

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 30 : Number Four : Winter 2009

## Perspectives on Intimacy

Intimacy in Marriage

Marriage and Friendship

Religion and Emotional Well-Being

Healthy Intimacy in Formation

Presence and Absence

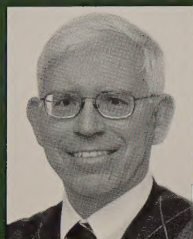
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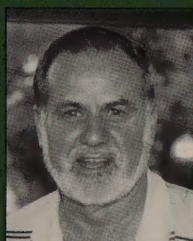
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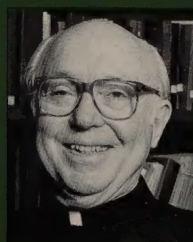
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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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# Editor's Page

## THE MEASURE OF INTIMACY

There are perhaps as many ways to define intimacy as there are different types of relationships. As I reflected on intimacy as the theme of this issue of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, I reviewed favorite books and articles to recall what the authors had said about intimacy. Doing so helped me focus on the words that best express for me the meaning of intimacy. These words are not something I found in a book or on a website. They welled up from within, from my own search for and experience of intimacy. Intimacy is to know and be known.

I have been blessed to have many kinds of intimacy in my life. I know and am known by many people: my wife, my children, my family, my friends, and my professional colleagues. They have all invited me to come to know them and I, in turn, have opened myself to being known by them. The fact that these intimacies are at different levels does not make them any less real. Indeed, it seems to me that we often fail to appreciate the myriad ways we know others and are known by them because we so idealize the concept of intimacy that only "perfect" intimacy is considered worthy of the name. But there is no such thing. The measure of intimacy is not necessarily how much we know about each other, but the truth of that knowledge.

Reflecting on our most intimate relationship can offer us important insights into the possibilities and the limits of intimacy. For me, this relationship is my marriage. But for others it could be a family relationship of another kind or a longtime friendship. Intimate relationships all have certain things in common, among them the realities that all intimacy is based on true knowledge of the other, while at the same time that knowledge is limited.

My wife and I are blessed to share a deep relationship. No one else knows each of us the way the other does. We have been married long enough to know who the true person is beyond the everyday ups and downs of our lives. Yet while our shared knowledge is true, it is not complete. I know her as a husband and friend.

But I do not know her the way her mother knows her, or the way each of our children knows her.

The most intimate knowledge of another is incomplete not only because of the limits of any relationships, but also because of the fact that we are always changing and developing. We are always being shaped by forces that we cannot completely name, and indeed, we do not even know ourselves as thoroughly as we might. Only God can know us completely. But human intimacy allows us to share the truth of who we are and invites us to discover through the other, who we are becoming.

## NEW PERSPECTIVES

Genuine intimacy, then, has these two qualities: it is both true and yet incomplete. Identifying these qualities in our deepest relationships can help us gain a new perspective on all of our relationships. We learn the value of truth, we are better able to respect one another's boundaries, and we become more grateful for the gift of the other.

Self-disclosure is an essential dimension of every intimate relationship. As relationships grow, we must learn how to speak authentically about who we are and who we perceive the other to be. Our identities are caught up in the daily activities of our lives, and when we relate those to one another we are sharing who we are. But the truth of who we are is more than what we do. It emerges from the web of relationships we live in, it is part of a longer story of our life's journey, and it is always unfolding in new ways. Offering this to others, and inviting others to do the same for us is the challenge of truthfulness.

Yet we must also respect the boundaries of a relationship. Sometimes we may want to accelerate the pace of a relationship to a level for which the other is not ready. We can often misread another's signals. Having a sense of what is appropriate is a way of being truthful, truthful to the reality of the moment.



Respecting truthfulness in relationships also teaches us that authentic knowledge of another person is not the same as knowing everything about the other. We often undervalue our relationships because they are limited. But intimacy occurs in all kinds of relationships, whenever someone reveals something of personal importance. It may be a struggle at work, news about a child, or a personal problem of some sort.

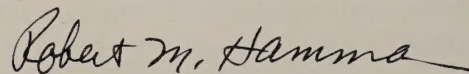
When we reflect on the varied relationships in our lives and the many ways different people have opened themselves to us, we naturally become grateful. We recognize that the truths they have offered us are gifts. They are expressions in some way of who the other really is.

Appreciation of intimacy as a gift can occur when we learn to balance truthfulness with incompleteness. Relationships that last over time and distance usually have this quality. When we reunite with such friends, there is a genuineness that transcends the fact that there is much that has occurred that we do not know about and are not able to share. But we can be certain that what we do know is true, and that is enough to

sustain a friendship.

Intimacy is a gift. We begin to experience this gift when we share the truths of our lives and welcome the truths of others, even though we are so often limited in our ability to do this as we would wish. Let us neither ignore this gift nor take it for granted, but gratefully give thanks for our various experiences of intimacy.

The articles in this issue deal with intimacy from many perspectives. Intimacy with others and with God, and acceptance of oneself. They explore the central role of intimacy in the married and celibate life, in active ministry and in formation. It is our hope that you will find them beneficial both personally and in your ministry to others.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert M. Hamma". The signature is written in dark ink and has a fluid, personal style.

Robert M. Hamma



# Intimacy and Healthy Affective Maturity

## *Guidelines for Formation*

Kevin P. McClone, M.Div., Psy.D.



A crucial aspect of healthy religious formation involves assessing a candidate's capacity for intimacy and affective maturity. The Vatican statement, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, (hereafter noted as *Guidelines*) brought the issue of healthy relationships and affective maturity to the forefront. What does testing and assessment reveal about a candidate's capacity for close interpersonal relationships? How does someone on a formation team use the results of such testing as a tool to foster the growth of a candidate? Knowing that healthy relating and connections with self, others and God are crucial to effective and fulfilling pastoral ministry, how does one help a candidate grow in this capacity? To what extent is this issue one on which a candidate's readiness for ministry should be judged? In this article, I will explore various capacities that help to foster greater intimacy and affective maturity. Next, I will explore various obstacles to developing healthy intimacy and affective maturity and end by offering practical implications for lay, clergy and religious formation personnel in assisting the candidate's growth in intimacy and healthy relating with self, others and God.

In my work both as director of the Institute for Sexuality Studies and providing weekly seminars at the Institute for Religious Formation at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, I hear many questions from clergy, religious and lay ecclesial formation personnel dealing with ways to better identify, assess, and enhance a candidate's capacity for healthy intimacy and affective maturity. As I listen to their questions, it becomes clear that there is often some confusion on their part as to just what intimacy and affective maturity means.



The word intimacy is derived from two Latin words. *Intimus* refers to that which is innermost, and the word *intimare* means to hint at, announce, publish or make known. Combining these meanings leads us to see the process of intimacy as “making known that which is innermost.” Thomas Malone notes in his book, the *Art of Intimacy*, that the outstanding quality of the intimate experience is the “sense of being in touch with our real selves.” To risk self-disclosure presupposes a certain self-awareness and self-intimacy that allows me to share who I am. Affective maturity involves having the relational skills to more effectively identify, understand and express my real feelings with the diversity of persons that make up the contemporary church while having a growing capacity to listen, understand, and empathize with their experiences.

Some questions for candidates to explore to better understand their capacity for intimacy and affective maturity might be as follows: How well do I know myself with a balanced sense of my strengths and weaknesses? Do I know myself well enough to share my authentic self with others? Do I like the person that I am becoming? Do I esteem myself? Do I have close friends with whom I can deeply share? Am I comfortable being alone with myself as well as being with others? How am I growing in my intimacy with God? How do I relate to women? How do I relate to men? How can I be more my real self while relating to other persons? How comfortable am I relating to those in authority? What obstacles stand in the way of my growth in healthy intimacy and affective maturity? Am I comfortable with my own sexuality and do I seek to integrate it respectfully in the commitments that I make?

#### I. CAPACITIES FOR HEALTHY INTIMACY AND AFFECTIVE MATURITY

When exploring key capacities for healthy intimacy and affective maturity a core place to begin is looking at one's capacity for healthy relationships. To be an effective pastoral minister in the diverse church of today is to be relational. This implies the growing capacity to relate in more honest and conscious ways with oneself, with others and with God. These various relational dimensions are interconnected and influence each other's growth. For example, to the degree that I become more in touch with my true self, I grow to be more authentic in my

relationships with others and my intimacy with God deepens. In sum, intimacy demands a more active engagement in taking the necessary risks to grow in self-intimacy, interpersonal intimacy and intimacy with God. The formator may inquire: to what degree does this candidate demonstrate a growing capacity to relate to a wide diversity of persons that make up the contemporary church in a way that builds deeper connection, tolerance for diversity and support?

#### Self-Awareness

Another key set of skills for healthy relating and affective maturity involves the growing capacity for deepening self-awareness. The formator must know how to evaluate the person in his totality, not forgetting the gradual nature of psychosexual development (*Guidelines*, II, 4). He or she must see the candidate's strong and weak points, as well as the level of awareness that the candidate has of his or her own family of origin history and its impact on his/her life. Healthy intimacy indeed presupposes certain reflective self-awareness. When I interview and assess candidates for religious life or lay formation, I always ask some questions related to their own self-awareness, such as: how well do they feel they know themselves? What do they see as their key strengths and weaknesses? Do they seem to have a healthy balance of awareness of both their unique strengths and limitations?

#### An Internal Locus of Control

Candidates who seem to present the most challenges are those who are still struggling to discover themselves and as a result rely too much on others to discover who they are. In other words, they may have more of what psychologists refer to as an external locus of control versus a more internal locus of control. Individuals with a high internal locus of control believe that outcomes result primarily from their own behavior and actions. They have a sense of agency which tends to make them more accountable and responsible for their behavior. Those with a high external locus of control by contrast believe that powerful others, fate, or chance primarily determine outcomes. So those with a high internal locus of control take more ownership of their behavior and are more active in seeking information and knowledge



concerning their situation rather than blaming others. As a result, such persons are better equipped to tackle life's challenges, transitions, and wounds in ways that foster healing and growth.

The Vatican document aptly speaks to this need for an internal locus of control that encourages candidates to take responsibility for their own healing and growth process:

Among the candidates can be found some who come from particular experiences—human, family, professional, intellectual or affective—which, in various ways, have left psychological wounds that are not yet healed and that cause disturbances. These wounds, unknown to the candidate in their real effects, are often erroneously attributed by him to causes outside himself, thus depriving him of the possibility of facing them adequately (*Guidelines*, III, 5).

Ultimately growth in healthy intimacy and affective maturity involves naming, claiming and embracing old hurts and negative scripts from families of origin and making conscious decisions to act with integrity.

#### Capacity for Self-acceptance

I may have some adequate knowledge of my psychosexual history but to what degree have I accepted this unique self that I am coming to know more deeply? One aspect that I feel is crucial here is the willingness to embrace one's wounds, mistakes and limitations. Most of us have both hurt and been hurt by others as we grow in our relational lives. It seems to me that those who are growing in healthy intimacy have learned through time to become more accepting of their strengths but also of their wounds and limitations and have let go of the need to live up to other's expectations. This inner freedom allows for greater spontaneity and less self-consciousness. Many developmental psychologists will report that it is impossible to accept the love of others until you love your own self. If others love you and you do not love your own self, sooner or later you will regard them as misguided,

Ultimately growth in healthy intimacy and affective maturity involves naming, claiming and embracing old hurts and negative scripts from families of origin and making conscious decisions to act with integrity.

stupid, or suspiciously needy. And eventually you will treat them that way. That will make it that much harder for them to love you, and so your fears will be confirmed. You are right. You are not lovable. So "intimacy requires a level of self-awareness and of vulnerability which exposes you-to-yourself" (Dowrick, pp. 47-48).

Many young people coming in for psychological testing often present as overly virtuous and may be invested in wanting to "look good." As a result, many may tend to avoid looking at weaknesses, mistakes, or areas of growth as if that makes them less acceptable. As the Congregation for Catholic Education aptly points out, "there is a possible tendency of some candidates to minimize or deny their own weaknesses. Such candidates do not speak to the formators about some of their serious difficulties, as they fear they will not be understood or accepted (*Guidelines*, III, 8). Others cling falsely to the notion that their weaknesses pose obstacles to the religious life. Sometimes it is growing up in an alcoholic family, or being the victim of abuse or neglect that leaves them feeling vulnerable. Clearly coming from dysfunctional or addictive families of origin poses certain risk factors and perhaps in some cases raise red flags, yet the real key is how those individuals respond to these wounds and life challenges. Do they seek help from others? Do they feel their painful feelings but not get stuck there? Do they give in to fear, anxiety, depression, shame and self-doubt? A measure of future performance in dealing with life's challenges is past success in working through hardships and difficulties.



Change and growth involve confronting life's challenges head on with a spirit of honesty and empathy rather than giving in to fear, self-doubt or anxiety.

#### Growing Self-esteem

Nathaniel Branden defines self-esteem as the reputation one has with oneself. So it will be important to learn how candidates really feel about themselves. Do they genuinely like the person they are becoming or do they feel inadequate, shameful, or unworthy? How we see ourselves has a great impact on what we bring to our relationships and religious communities. How does a formator assess one's sense of self-esteem? Certainly there are more formal measurements like the Sixteen Personality Factor (16PF) and MMPI-II and other tests that help along with a clinical interview and behavioral assessments in assessing levels of self-esteem. Formators can assist candidates in their efforts to grow in self-esteem by providing creative opportunities to gain meaningful ministry and relationship experiences that allow them to expand their comfort zones. So the candidates who are more reserved may be challenged to take more initiative in the community; busy candidates may be encouraged to slow down and develop their more contemplative side; and perfectionist candidates may be challenged to accept their weaknesses and limitations as pathways to grace and compassion with self, others, and God.

#### Establishing a Healthy Identity

Many candidates for ministry and religious life devote a great deal of energy discovering to a fuller extent who they are. To the degree that this preoccupies more of their time, energy, and internal

resources, they will have less capacity to fully engage in healthy relationships with others and in pastoral ministry. Fear of being known more fully or living out of half-truths inhibits one's capacity to be more fully connected to self, others, and God. By contrast when candidates deeply value their identity and see it as gift they become freer to be authentic in life-giving ways. Psychosexual maturity involves a gradual acceptance and embracing of one's unique sexuality and sexual identity rather than being caught in the extremes of either relationship avoidance or compulsivity in relationships. Both extremes take root in attitudes of denial, fear, anxiety and shame.

#### Dealing with Change

One of the signs of growth is a person's capacity to deal with change. Here one looks at particular coping strengths candidates possess in dealing effectively with loss, stress and change. I often look for resiliency in their psychosexual journey and take a close look at what persons do with the sufferings and trials of life. While no one can predict what the future will hold, there is some awareness that effective pastoral ministry will involve the capacity to deal more effectively with suffering, conflict, differing personalities and uncertainty in more compassionate ways. Change and growth involve confronting life's challenges head on with a spirit of honesty and empathy rather than giving in to fear, self-doubt or anxiety.

#### Relational Flexibility

Recent resiliency research highlights the reality that suffering and hardship in one's family of origin are not destiny but often can lead to success in life and ministry when those wounds are embraced and persons grow through suffering, loss and tragedy. This will demand a certain relational flexibility and adaptability which are key to affective maturity. An obstacle here would be rigidity, whether in extreme liberal or conservative mind-sets that don't allow space for meaningful dialogue with those who may have differing views. Indeed a growing compassion and tolerance for others from differing perspectives is one of the hallmarks of psychosexual maturity. To live is to change and living well is to change often.



A final intrapersonal skill to assess is the candidate's capacity for healthy solitude. Stephanie Dowrick explores this primacy of solitude in developing healthy intimacy and points out that your connections with others can only be as rewarding as the connection with the "someone" with whom you live every moment of your own life: your own self. Knowing you can enjoy your own company is a vital precursor to being able to enjoy other people's company without feelings of panic and neediness. Indeed, coming to value our own company precedes believing that one can matter to other people.

Separateness and autonomy are key to healthy adult intimacy and affective maturity. I can't be together with you unless I have some sense of autonomy and separateness that I often discover in moments of solitude. Navigating solitude draws us deeper into our true self, unveiling the masks and shadow selves that only serve to block spontaneity, freedom, and authentic loving. To what degree does this candidate demonstrate a growing appreciation of solitude, contemplation and reflection? Thomas Merton was fond of saying to his monks that they don't go to the desert to get away from people but to draw closer to them. For many lay ministers finding time for solitude may be a particular challenge yet is crucial to effective relational ministry. Many clergy and religious women and men too can run from solitude into busy lives that keep them from developing their more contemplative side.

### III. GROWING IN DEEPER CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

How does the candidate bring skills of self-intimacy such as self-knowledge, self-acceptance and self-esteem to bear on relating more effectively with others? When we enjoy and value who we are becoming, we are freer to relate in less self-conscious ways with others. Are candidates less fearful of what others may think, knowing deep down that he or she is lovable, a person of dignity and worthy of respect? Are candidates aware that they need not have it "all together," that everyone has natural human weaknesses and limitations? Indeed grace and growth in the spiritual life often flow from embracing our imperfections rather than seeking perfection.

Indeed grace and growth in the spiritual life often flow from embracing our imperfections rather than seeking perfection.

### Sharing One's Authentic Self

Developmental theorists writing on intimacy suggest that any healthy adult intimacy involves the capacity to share more of one's authentic self with another. This presupposes not only a certain self-knowledge but also skills of self-disclosure and taking the risks to share with trusted others. Communication skills can be further developed through learning how to listen well and growing in ability to empathize with others. Given the critical importance of healthy communication to pastoral ministry, how can we better understand, assess, and foster growth in clergy, religious or lay candidates to ministry? Formators can first model healthy communicating in their own capacity to self-disclose in appropriate ways as well as in the way they listen, attend to, and seek to understand the candidate's experience.

Interpersonal competencies stress the importance of listening, empathy and being open to the whole range of human feelings and experiences with a compassionate ear. Indeed today there is a growing appreciation in the workplace, schools and in ministry that affective skills and emotional intelligence skills are key to successful relationships. Gerald Arbuckle speaks of these sets of skills as having "affective competency" that allow one to achieve deeper intimacy across cultures (Arbuckle, p. 22). People with affective competency keep sharpening their own human sensors of listening, empathy and feeling. It is



hard and painful work that involves becoming aware of one's own cultural values and prejudices and how these block one's ability to listen to others. In other words, it is not easy. I am challenged to deepen my own self-knowledge, knowledge of the other, and the capacity to communicate my authentic feelings to others and at the same time, risk being misunderstood.

#### Capacity for Trust and Mutuality

A central building block to intimacy and affective maturity is the growing capacity to trust. Having close relationships of mutual trust frees us to be more real, to let go of the need for pretense and trust revealing our true selves. Yet many candidates may have real core issues with trust rooted in past relationships that left them hurt or wounded. Growth in trust and mutuality may involve inviting candidates to enter into trusting relationships with formators, spiritual directors and in some cases support groups to further develop relational skills. This is part of the mystery behind the success of many twelve-step recovery groups where so many who felt lost, alone and fearful found hope and trust in the support, acceptance, and shared vulnerability of other group members. Likewise many priests have found in the context of priest support groups and other friendships the freedom to grow and deepen their own affective potential through intentional commitments of mutual support. Trust takes time to develop and involves hard work and a willingness to risk.

#### Balanced Self-Care

Love of others is tied to healthy love of self as reflected in the capacity for balanced self-care. Growth in healthy intimacy and affective maturity implies a growing capacity to care for oneself in all dimensions: body, mind and spirit. Listening to one's needs for balance, harmony and wholeness are key. Many religious and clergy have discovered the hard way through burnout and various overdependencies that not attending to self-care can have disastrous consequences. Lay ecclesial ministers may also struggle to balance care of self and family needs with ministerial demands. What are some ways to both assess and assist candidates at risk for such excesses? One might explore how the candidate's past experiences reflect a balanced lifestyle of activity, interests and self-care.

For example, does he or she have hobbies that energize him or her? Do they eat, drink and sleep well? Is there balance between ministry and rest, prayer and spiritual development? How have they utilized spiritual direction and counseling? What do they do for fun or in their free time?

#### Listening

Listening well is essential to intimacy. How is this person growing in capacity for listening and attention? To truly connect with self, others and God we need to hear what is being revealed in these encounters. A block to listening is anything that impedes our capacity to attend fully to the voices of self, others and God. For many candidates, listening is blocked because they had few models of healthy listening growing up. We learn how to listen from those who listened well to us. Listening is the fundamental skill for relational pastoral ministry. It is a critical communication skill that formators can both attend to in candidates and model in their own mindful listening to what candidates say both verbally and nonverbally.

### III. KEY OBSTACLES TO GROWTH IN HEALTHY INTIMACY AND AFFECTIVE MATURITY

There are many obstacles that threaten to block these capacities for healthy intimacy and affective maturity that must be recognized and faced by candidates to clergy, religious life and lay formation. I will highlight some of the key obstacles and suggest ways to address them. Areas that have been previously mentioned as obstacles include strong affective dependencies; notable lack of freedom in relationships with others; excessive rigidity of character and uncertain sexual identity.

#### Facing One's Mortality

Facing our human limitations and ultimately, death, is no easy task and many avoid these uncomfortable realities. Sometimes drawing close to others in deeper ways comes as we more fully embrace our finite and limited nature. To face our mortality is to know that we have limits and acceptance of these limits does not so much bring death but rather new life. The great paradox here is that letting go and accepting our



limitations we become more alive by becoming more real. Grace and healing come through woundedness, not by seeking to avoid suffering, pain, and loss.

Pain

Patrick Collins notes that fear of pain can block self-intimacy whether that pain is from childhood or other family of origin experiences (Collins, p. 33). Many things prevent connection: unintentional drift through busyness and commitments; avoidance due to the fear of getting too close; inability or lack of desire to resolve conflicts that arise; prior unresolved hurtful relationships; lack of empathy and feeling unsafe, particularly if previous disclosures are brought up as weapons in a later conversation. Many candidates and perhaps formators as well find dealing with conflict something they would rather avoid. It is often a source of discomfort and depending on one's family of origin could bring feelings of greater dread and panic. Yet, real connection often flows out of relationships that have been able to successfully negotiate conflict and confrontation. Most married couples discover this and often remark that moments of deepest intimacy came by working through marital conflicts.

### Unhealthy Communication

Unhealthy communication can be a block to healthy intimacy and affective maturity. Communication helps foster greater connection and communication is fundamentally a learned set of skills and behaviors. Who were your role models for communication from your family, relationships and religious communities? Many candidates are challenged in this area having grown up in families where the predominant messages led to more secrecy, denial, and avoidance of sharing real feelings than authentically embracing them. This is certainly the case in many alcoholic families where the predominant messages are don't talk, don't trust and don't feel. A candidate who is struggling to know herself or himself better has to break through these deeply ingrained messages and uncover more life-giving scripts that tell him or her it's OK to feel feelings, to express them openly and to trust and draw close to others in appropriate and respectful ways.

Candidates who have learned through their mistakes, trials and errors to deal with conflict are better equipped to face the many changes and challenges they will inevitably face in ministry or religious life.

### Conflict and Confrontation

Dealing effectively with conflict and confrontation are key intimacy skills and signs of growing affective maturity. Candidates who have learned through their mistakes, trials and errors to deal with conflict are better equipped to face the many changes and challenges they will inevitably face in ministry or religious life. Some candidates know their weaknesses but lack the assertiveness to risk sharing their true feelings. They fail to assert what they want, how they feel, or deal effectively with conflict. Confrontation without care is control, and so learning to confront others must be rooted in genuine care for the spiritual good of the other if it is to be successful. In my experience many lay ministers and formators have great difficulty learning to confront with care and yet this is crucial in developing intimate relationships.

### Fear

Fear is probably the biggest obstacle that I hear whenever I ask persons what holds them back from growing in intimacy and affective maturity. Fear of rejection, fear of conflict, fear of failure and fear of being embarrassed are the most common fears. Whatever the fear, the reality is that intimacy demands the courage to risk reaching out to others in faith, and trust that one will fundamentally not be crushed in the process. Courage is born out of the conviction that one



The formator must know how to evaluate the whole person in his or her totality, not forgetting the gradual nature of psychosexual development.

is loved and love conquers fear. Growing in healthy intimacy is about becoming more real. Many fears of rejection are rooted in past relationship wounds. To become more real involves facing the shadow parts of ourselves. Here the obstacles may be shame, false pride, perfectionism, low self-esteem and anxieties of all sorts. These and other obstacles block the light of truth and keep our true self hidden, preventing real connection with self and others.

#### IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR FORMATION

What implications can we draw from these reflections that may assist the process of clergy, lay ecclesial and religious formation? First of all, the formator must know how to evaluate the whole person in his or her totality, not forgetting the gradual nature of psychosexual development. Body, mind, spirit, social, cognitive and affective dimensions all are to be taken into account. Formation personnel must see both the candidate's strengths and weak points or areas of growth. The formator must discern the candidate's capacity for managing his or her own behavior in responsibility and freedom (*Guidelines*, II, 4). In order to more effectively evaluate and foster affective maturity in candidates for priesthood, religious life and lay ministry some key guidelines may be helpful to explore.

Formation personnel can assess growth in healthy intimacy by taking a closer look at a candidate's overall relational history. This history will seek to uncover the strengths and weaknesses candidates

possess in their relationship with themselves, with others, and with God. The formator can assess the pattern of relationships and friendships with both women and men. Special attention can be paid to the length of those relationships, the quality of interaction and what they have learned through those experiences about themselves, others and relationships in general. In other words healthy relationships should ultimately lead one to greater growth and change and if not, why not? We might look further at how each of these relationships began and ended. Did these relationships reflect qualities of mutual respect or were they more selfish pursuits, more of what Erik Erikson described as the "need-seeking hungry kind," where persons try to discover their own identity in another?

Other aspects to explore when evaluating candidates for pastoral ministry and religious life might be as follows: How have these candidates dealt with suffering, loss and periods of loneliness and transition in their lives? Have they denied these sources of suffering, or embraced them openly? Have they developed a capacity to cope with the stressors of life and to seek guidance from others? One priest in ministry for some thirty years told me that he always felt a certain pride in not needing help from anyone and being fully self-sufficient. It was only after an emotional breakdown that he painfully came to discover that this wound of self-sufficiency served to keep God and others at a distance. When he was able to let go of control and of having to do it all, he was open to ask others for help and his weakness became his major source of healing, growth and more authentic relating with himself, others and God. We might ask, then, to what degree do these candidates demonstrate they have grown through past failings, sufferings and losses? Do they view mistakes in relationships as opportunities and stepping stones to grace, change and growth or as burdens to be either avoided or denied?

Formators perhaps can best foster growth in candidates by being aware of how they themselves have developed greater self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-acceptance in their own psychosexual journey in relationships. Truly, experience is often the best teacher. Looking into their own growth process formators may see how being encouraged to reflect deeply, take risks, try new ministries, and face new challenges helped them to grow in confidence and



esteem. It is this wisdom born out of their own reflection and rich life experiences that will guide the growth of candidates in compassion and in truth. Candidates grow by being able to relate to formators who have sought to integrate their own pain and struggles growing up in their relational lives. So, formators can assist greatly by the attitude they personally model with regard to dealing with their own limitations and weaknesses. By modeling acceptance and encouraging growth-enhancing opportunities in community, ministry and studies they can foster candidates' own growth and acceptance of their whole selves. Formators can model balanced self-care that reflects their genuine reliance on God and others; they can model both healthy communication and an appreciation for solitude and holistic living.

If there is low self-esteem or unhealthy patterns that seem to block genuine growth, candidates may need more professional help to unlock destructive negative tapes from the past and substitute more affirming self-talk. We grow by being challenged to go beyond our comfort zones. Growth comes through risk and learning from one's mistakes. We grow through challenging the best within us, not by avoiding risk or running from pain and conflicts. Ultimately candidates get better at change by being given opportunities to change and the support and encouragement they need to risk growing in relationships with self, others and God.

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# COMMUNICATING INTIMACY

## *in Marriage*



Tony Garascia, L.C.S.W.

*Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.*

*— Benjamin Franklin*

It's a "no brainer" that intimacy is an important ingredient in making marriage work. Study after study confirms that both men and women list intimacy as a key factor in marital happiness. But here's the problem that married couples face: if everyone knows that intimacy is such an important thing in a marriage why is it so difficult to obtain? That's the million-dollar question.

Let's start with an image: suppose we say that intimacy is the water that floats the boat of your marriage. Developing the image we can say that marriage is like taking a canoe trip together down a river. The surrounding shoreline serves as the context of your marriage. As you drift or paddle you sometimes observe a quiet pastoral setting with tree-lined shores and a calm, easy-flowing river. Life is good. You and your spouse, in your canoe, move almost effortlessly down the river. Every once in a while you pull into shore for a break, get the picnic basket out and have some food and drink. You're so relaxed that you might even make love on a secluded beach.



But life moves on. You get back into your canoe and shove off, happy to be together. The water—in this case intimacy—is deep enough to float your boat, and its currents take you along almost without any effort. Then, things begin to change. They can change gradually or suddenly, but eventually your canoe enters rough water and both of you get more concerned about keeping your boat from getting swamped. Suddenly you realize that this canoe trip—intimacy—isn't as fun as it used to be; in fact, it can be a plain bother. Not only that, but now the two of you are shouting directions at each other, often at cross purposes. You even resort to saying things like, "That was a stupid move," and, "I can't believe you did that." Both of you become angry and hurt.

You survive the rapids and learn a few things about keeping your canoe afloat in rough water, but both of you are a little bit hurt and angry at the other for the sharp words. You drift silently for a while pondering what to do and say. Suddenly your canoe runs aground; you have reached a shallow part of the river where there is only about three inches of water and you have to get out and pull the canoe forward. You pull and pull but the water doesn't get any deeper. Again you start to argue with each other. "We should have gone down that other fork. I can't believe you wanted us to take this one." You argue about your direction, compete for control, and realize that you can't really go back. All you can do is go forward and hope the water eventually gets deeper. You begin to say to yourself, "This trip isn't as fun as I thought it would be."

Intimacy, like water, comes in all forms. Sometimes it comes to us as gentle water, soothing and sustaining. Sometimes it comes as a rainstorm, where there are problems to be faced and issues to discuss. And sometimes it feels like the intensity of a hurricane, where all you can do is try to keep your balance and take shelter. And while we all say we want intimacy in a relationship, what we really mean is that we only want the gentle, sustaining intimacy where we have good feelings and low conflict. What we don't bargain for is the intimacy of honest conversation where anger and conflict are directly faced. And more than that, sometimes the intimacy seems to go away completely and we're left to pull the boat of our marriage by ourselves, not feeling very in love with the person who agreed to take the journey with us. When we encounter the scary side of intimacy, many of us want to run and avoid.

## WHAT MEN AND WOMEN MEAN BY INTIMACY

Another difficulty with the word intimacy is that men and women mean slightly different things when we use it. Intimacy is often defined as affection, fondness, love, tenderness, experience, familiarity, understanding, closeness, friendship, coitus, intercourse, love-making. That's quite a list and covers a lot of territory. There are certain subtle nuances to the word that are important to understand if we really want to communicate with each other in a way that is intimate. According to one study there are at least five nuances to the word intimacy that affect a married couple (J.M. Gold, "Gender and Intimacy," *The Family Journal*, 5(3), 1998, 199-203). They are:

1. Emotional intimacy as closeness and sharing of feelings. This includes all the feelings, especially anger. In this definition closeness comes from the sharing of feelings.
2. Social intimacy as sharing friends and social networks. This type of intimacy places emphasis on getting together with friends and associates, whether the activities be playing cards, partying, tailgating or just a quiet evening of conversation.
3. Intellectual intimacy as sharing of ideas and values. Does it surprise you that this type of sharing creates intimacy? Think about it. Weren't there times in college or high school where ideas really turned you on and you were attracted to people because of the ideas and values they talked about? That's what we're talking about.
4. Sexual intimacy as sexual expression and passion. No need to expand here. This is a very obvious aspect of intimacy.
5. Recreational intimacy as playing and having fun together. "Are we having fun yet?"

Well, are you? Marriage should be a source of fun for two people. "But how can we have fun when we're sharing conflictual feelings and even anger?" Intimacy really is more complicated than we realize.



When researchers look into the difference between men and women on the topic of intimacy they come up with some interesting findings. Women tend to place a higher emphasis on understanding and acceptance, trust and commitment, caring and support, and the sharing of feelings. No surprise here. Men place higher emphasis on maintaining good feelings and harmony between the two. What this means is that when a woman wants to talk about something conflictual the first instinct of the man might be to downplay the conflict. The man means well because he is acting out of his understanding of intimacy. But the woman will often take the downplaying as avoidance and become either more angry or more hurt. Complicated business, intimacy.

Wives indicate more dissatisfaction with the emotional and intellectual aspects of marital intimacy whereas husbands report greater dissatisfaction with the social and recreational components.

What this means is that there is a tendency for wives, when dissatisfied, to feel cut off emotionally and intellectually from their husbands. They might complain to a friend that their husbands don't share their feelings and don't communicate with them as much as they would like concerning their thoughts on current events, their values, the issues at the job site, and the like.

Husbands, when dissatisfied, tend to feel that their wives do not want to participate with them as much in social activities or in social networks; they also may feel more cut off from their wives in terms of doing things together recreationally. Also important for husbands is the maintaining of harmony in the relationship.

Here, it is important to note the distinction between having "good feelings" or harmony and the

sharing of feelings. While women place more emphasis on the sharing of feelings, men often get themselves into a bind when they begin to think that the sharing of what they perceive as "negative" feelings (anger, hurt, sorrow, etc.) will destroy the harmony in the relationship. If husbands could understand that the expressing and talking about "negative" feelings will build harmony between the two then they might be more willing to partake in an exchange of feelings with their wives.

What about sexual lovemaking? Recent studies indicate that this aspect of intimacy is valued just about equally between the sexes as an important part of intimacy. This may come as a surprise to some readers, due to the stereotype that suggests husbands wanting to make love more than their wives. However, there seems to be more equality between husbands and wives concerning the importance of lovemaking in the relationship. At least one researcher claims that couples who maintain a frequency of lovemaking at least once a week report a higher marital satisfaction.

#### BLOCKS TO INTIMACY

Clearly, there are times when we cannot communicate what we want. You love each other yet find there are times when instead of communicating love, tension and conflict result. John Gottman, author and marriage researcher, cites four potentially dangerous communication patterns that will eventually kill a marriage. In his book *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* he calls these patterns the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" for marriages, because their presence will truly erode the grace and goodness of the marriage. The four horsemen are:

<i>Criticism</i>	Attacking the position of the other by making his or her position...or behavior appear wrong.	Use of "never" and "always" in dispute, use of blaming of the other for something that went wrong.
<i>Contempt</i>	Attacking the person of the other by use of hurtful and negative personal characteristics.	Use of name calling, "you're stupid," hostile humor or sarcasm, use of words like, "bitch, bastard, witch, ugly, lazy, fat, etc."
<i>Defensiveness</i>	Seeing the self as a victim of an attack, attempting...to ward off the attack.	Making excuses, invoking "it's not fair," using the defenses of rationalization, intellectualization or denial to ward off perceived attack.
<i>Stonewalling</i>	Withdrawing from conflict "shutting down, shutting up."	When problems or issues are brought up, or when feelings are hurt, the person withdraws and becomes silent, just not dealing with the issue or person.



The presence of these destructive communication patterns is similar to taking a small amount of herbicide and every day putting some of it around your favorite tree. One small dose of the herbicide might not kill the tree outright, but a continual application will eventually begin to undermine the root system of the tree, resulting in eventual death of the tree. Your relationship is like a tree that needs to be protected from toxic communication patterns. Make a commitment to stamp out these patterns so that each of you can maximize the potential of your relationship.

It takes practice and discipline to live a busy, stressed existence and take time to listen to the ones we love

## A SLICE OF LIFE

Carol was twenty when her parents divorced. At the time she was a sophomore in college and she took the news quite hard. She knew that her parents had argued frequently but always assumed that they would “kiss and make up.” She simply had no clue that their marriage was in trouble.

The explanation both of her parents gave her was the same: there had been no affairs and both had simply drifted apart from each other over the years. Her dad would golf regularly while her mom played tennis and had an active social life outside the home. Carol just never saw the divorce coming.

The next few years were tough on Carol. She finished college but her grades suffered a bit. Her own sense of self-trust and self-esteem, which hadn't been all that great before her parents' divorce, now began to suffer even more. She experienced a number of quick, intense relationships with men, all of them ending abruptly and all of them causing her concern about her ability to enter into a long-term relationship.

Now at age thirty-one Carol was facing her first crisis in her own marriage. She and Matt had been married for eight years and had two young children, ages five and two. Carol was beginning to feel that she didn't love Matt anymore. Their courtship had been one where Matt had been the primary pursuer. Carol had been reluctant at first and had rebuffed Matt's advances on a number of occasions. But Matt had been determined and they eventually began to date. Carol found Matt to be sensitive, caring, and organized, but conservative in his tastes and habits. While Carol liked to go out dancing or be with friends, Matt preferred a quiet evening at home. And when she would express her dissatisfaction she felt that Matt was dismissive of her point of view. It was almost as if he didn't want to

talk with her, which was confusing. In the early years of courtship and marriage they had often gone for long walks and Matt seemed intensely interested in her thoughts and feelings.

The way Carol put it, there was little “pizzazz” left in the relationship. She began to wonder if she had made a mistake in marrying Matt and whether he had appeared a “safe” bet to her, coming off of the turmoil created from her own parents' divorce. She knew that she was also a bit overwhelmed from being a mother of two young children and wondered if she just wasn't burned out altogether. She recently had begun losing weight and began waking up around three in the morning. All she would do was worry. She wanted to take the risk and tell her husband how she felt, but was afraid that he would dismiss her concerns again. Yet she knew that she was becoming increasingly dissatisfied.

## AWARENESS IN ACTION

It's easy to be completely present to someone when you're not hurried, stretched, or stressed out from the daily rhythm of life. Marriage is sometimes like a juggling act: we try to keep all the objects in the air, in balance, not dropping anything. It takes practice and discipline to live a busy, stressed existence and take time to listen to the ones we love. We need to remember that we juggle all the things of married life because they are worth keeping in the air, worth not being dropped. Maybe we need to think about being more appreciative of the things that our spouse keeps going and communicate that to him/her. At the same



time we sometimes get out of touch with what first attracted us to each other.

1. Are the descriptions of the ways that men and women understand the word intimacy true of you and your spouse?
2. Are anger and dealing with hurt feelings the scariest part of intimacy for you? If so, what makes this either scary or difficult?
3. In the above slice of life Carol was afraid to talk to Matt about her feeling that their marriage had cooled off. What prevents you from dealing with the tougher issues? Do you fear rejection?
4. What is the benefit of taking the risk to deal with the tough issues?
5. Finally, is there anything that you want to do differently in order to take responsibility for how you create intimacy with your spouse?

#### THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION: INTIMACY AND SPIRITUALITY

“What if God were one of us, just a stranger on the bus . . .” goes a popular song. But suppose God really was one of us. Would God need to share feelings, values, and have fun together with friends? And most important, would God be open to suffering, to getting old, to having people disappoint and not keep their word? Christianity as a religion is based on that very premise: that God is one of us. Christianity holds that God is not a stranger, but is revealed to us in the stranger, as well as in those we know and in our spouse.

What if each of us carries within us the “God-force,” what we traditionally have called the Spirit of God? If we took this seriously, would this change the way we communicated with each other? Perhaps we would value just a little deeper the intimacy that we created, knowing that it partakes in the mystery which we name as God and creator.

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS HONESTLY, THEN SHARE.

- When I get angry I need. . . .
- If I had a magic wand and could use it on my intimate relationship(s) I would change. . . .
- What pleases me most about my skills are. . . .

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# The Marriage of Low-Maintenance Friends

Valerie and Randy Schultz



A friend who is half of one of our favorite couples once made a comment to us that we have kept close to our hearts. We were talking about how comforting and enjoyable it was to get together after a long period of non-communication and still be able to pick up the thread of friendship where we'd left off. "It's because we're low-maintenance friends," he said.

We knew exactly what he meant: that we didn't require a lot of care and feeding, and neither did they. There were no hard feelings if we missed one another's birthdays or didn't immediately inform each other of breaking news, if there were small lapses in the niceties. There were no repercussions if someone missed his or her turn to call. In fact, if you were always the one who calls, it didn't bother you.

As a married couple of nearly three decades, we treasure those friendships that have grown and stayed with us alongside the rambling adventure that we call our marriage. We have seen friendships come and go, mostly the kind that are based on transitory circumstances outside of ourselves. Coworkers, fellow moms at the bus stop, parishioners at the same church, and volunteers for a common cause are some of the relationships that we have seen blossom and then wither as soon as that which connected us was uprooted. But some friendships are perennials.



## Low-maintenance friends accept each other as they are, with no prerequisites for fixing personality defects.

Another couple we know is calling it quits after twenty years of marriage. Their relationship has been a volatile one, rough waters and rip tides rather than smooth seas. They are often in competition rather than in partnership. They have conflicting opinions and loud fights. They belittle and hack at each other. Their commitment has always seemed to require high maintenance. We, on the other hand, have very little drama between us. We rarely raise our voices to each other. Part of that may be that we both have non-confrontational personalities, but part of it is a conscious decision that honor and respect are conditions of our shared sacrament. We pretty much get along, even though we do admit to those fleeting moments of wanting to strangle each other.

### QUALITIES OF A LOW MAINTENANCE MARRIAGE

So we thought we'd try to figure out why we're still married when so many of our friends and peers have given up the ghost of their marriages. We wondered if we could draw a connection between low-maintenance friendship and low-drama marriage. Accordingly, and after several extended conversations (mostly on long trips in the car), we have come up with a low-maintenance manifesto of sorts, or at least a collection of thoughts on feeding the healthy qualities of low-maintenance friendship to nourish a marriage.

Low-maintenance friends are always happy to see each other. They can go years between meetings, and the pleasure of each other's company is always fresh.

Of course, in most marriages, husband and wives see each other every day. But ideally, one's mate should be one's first choice for company. We find that we are still actually glad to see each other at the end of the day, but it took a little fine tuning at the beginning of our marriage: we came to understand that one of us, upon arriving home from work, needs a few moments to decompress before the other jumps in with the news and issues of the day. We have established marital rituals that give us the paradoxical freedom of structure: we kiss, look at the mail, give the dogs their treats. We think about dinner. Then we talk.

Low-maintenance friends accept each other as they are, with no prerequisites for fixing personality defects. And really, how arrogant is it to demand that another person change, as we so often do in the context of a marriage? Is any one of us perfect just the way we are? Early on in our marriage, we discovered that we cook in very different ways: one of us spreads out all the ingredients at the beginning of a recipe, while the other takes things out and puts them back as soon as they are used. Imagine the frustration and potential for conflict before we ironed this out. We sometimes speculate on what our respective apartments would look like if we had each remained single, which would likely be a female abode of nearly anal law and order, and a bachelor pad obscured by piles and piles of important stuff.

A low-maintenance friendship thrives because of the willingness of all parties to forgive. And perhaps more importantly, to forget. We tend not to bring up the past when we have disagreements. We also avoid launching hot, conflicting topics that are not pertinent to the current issue, just as we would not intentionally pick a fight with a friend who holds a different opinion. We try not to reuse old weapons. We also honor an unspoken agreement not to hurt each other just for the sake of hurting, especially since we each know exactly, through the blessing of intimacy, how to hurt the other most effectively.

There is a serenity and a sense of proportion in knowing that your low-maintenance friend does not complete you, but rather complements the wholeness of you. When two people marry, they do not forfeit their individual interests or pursuits. We know a marriage in which the husband always wanted a boat. He'd grown up by the ocean and had been in the navy. But his wife got seasick. She couldn't go near a boat. She vetoed the boat idea, and he died boat-less. There had to have been a better compromise.



Low-maintenance friends have an instinctive ability to walk in each other's shoes. They share the underlying connection of kindred spirits. They occupy the same wavelength by filling in with their imaginations the experience of the other. When we are married, it is important at least to try on our spouse's shoes. This willingness to see anew actually serves us well in parenthood, in those instances when a child seems to have hailed from another planet.

The quirky qualities that endear our low-maintenance friends to us are perhaps more bearable because we do not see them that often. But would those qualities drive us nuts if we saw them every day? Sometimes we have to focus consciously on the qualities that made us so glad to be with our spouse in the first place, rather than use them as ammo to give each other grief. It can also help to turn those idiosyncrasies into a joke that the two of you share, or figure out other ways to make them a non-issue. We must, after all, honor each other's personalities, just as we do with our low-maintenance friends. The different assets we bring to our marriage can help us to appreciate the other's otherness.

The history you share with a low-maintenance friend means that you can always go back to old times and share those bygone good feelings and memories. Now think of the history you share with your spouse, the scope and intimacy of which are greater than anything you have with any other person. The sweet comfort and delight of those times are always available to you.

Admittedly, as we collaborated on this article, some old rough feelings surfaced, making us practice what we are attempting to preach. When we recalled the more difficult patches in our marriage in an effort to lay out how we got through them, some unresolved resentments that we thought had been resolved lurked and loitered. They made us realize that resolving them

would be an ongoing enterprise as long as we held onto them so tightly, and as long as we were willing to revive them. We had to acknowledge the times we had not supported each other, and then let them go. And we did. Just as low-maintenance friends can discuss things deeply without rehashing hurtful times, so can spouses.

Applying the principles of low-maintenance friendship to marriage is sometimes easier to talk about than to do. As in any endeavor, balance is required: if the relationship is only about your needs, or if you constantly put the other's needs first, you are going to have issues. It's not all about me, but it's also not all about you, which cements a foundation of two together on which any solid friendship or marriage rests.

The paradox at which we finally arrive is that with a bit of thoughtful, conscious maintenance, your spouse can be your lowest low-maintenance friend. And we are ever mindful that the perfect model of a low-maintenance friend is Jesus Christ, who is always happy to see us, who always forgives and forgets, who always loves and accepts us where we are, and who never minds being the one who has to call.



Valerie and Randy Schultz were college sweethearts. They have been married for 29 years, and have four daughters, ages 26, 25, 21, and 17. Valerie is a freelance writer, and a weekly columnist for the *the Bakersfield Californian*. Randy was a classroom teacher for many years. He earned his doctorate in 2002, and is now an assistant professor of education at Cal State Bakersfield. He is an avid cyclist. The Schultzes conduct weekend Catholic services at the state prison in Tehachapi, CA.



*Soul-Sharing*

James Torrens, S.J.



We know about intimacies, those touches in sensitive and responsive places of the body; and we know, perhaps less, about intimacy, soul-sharing. The two are often linked profoundly, but just as often remain clearly disparate. Leona English, in *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, has confirmed that observation: “Sexuality and intimacy are not synonymous; one does not necessitate the other. This is something that many know but never fully internalize (“A Close Look at Intimacy,” Summer 1999). English adds the sobering reminder that “intimacy is not only positive; it can also be negative, as when it results in combative relationships.”

The world will agree that without intimacy we can hardly function as human. Erik Erikson spoke of intimacy as a stage of young adulthood that everyone must negotiate, via faithfulness to commitments and readiness for sacrifice. The Sexual Revolution has muddied the waters by its focus on interaction of bodies, with purposeful neglect of their meaning, that is, of the shared values and shared future that sexual activity should bespeak.

The body has its attractions and urges, or hungers, which the spirit has to register and comply with or refuse to. These urges can become obsessive, with the spirit abetting or struggling desperately against them. In a strict religious upbringing, the whole realm of sexual attraction—sex playing upon one's thoughts—often has been steeped in a guiltiness that works against the kind of sanity and balance we were all created to know.



The English-speaking world has now seen the spectacle of godly people, clergy for example, who manage somehow to shelve their sense of real guilt while acting out sexually in ways addictive and predatory. We can't even begin to speak about intimacy in their lives, though twistedly this is what they seek. They are hiding so much even from themselves; they have little enough to share with others. As to "intimacies," their compulsive beguiling or forcing of themselves upon the young distorts that concept beyond recognition. Predatory sex among those consecrated to the service of God and neighbor presents an extreme case of airtight compartments, double lives that may baffle moralists but not psychologists.

The celibate life as a consecration to God calls for renouncing sexual intimacies. This does not mean that cravings will cease. Within this commitment, how painfully slow often is the maturing in self-discipline, self-control, custody of thoughts and affections that such a way of life calls for. When Saint Paul admitted to pleading for deliverance from his "thorn in the flesh" (2 *Corinthians* 12:7), he provoked centuries of conjecture by scripture scholars. He identified this thorn as "an angel of Satan to beat me," which may refer to demonic attacks of the kind endured by saints John Vianney and Gemma Galgani. It may instead refer to hounding by some persecutor. But sexual impulse as a source of continuing distress is not to be ruled out either, which should come as a consolation for those who have to fight a lifetime battle for peace in the flesh.

A man or woman can live a godly life, one of religious service or contemplation, without intimacies but not without intimacy, not without someone like-minded with whom to share challenges. Least of all can we do without the Great Intimate, the One who is the *raison d'être* for such a life, whose unconditional love keeps drawing us to an all-out response. This intimacy with the Lord in prayer, in faith, is always notable in the saints, the unofficial as well as the official ones. The way they share their affection, thoughts, projects, problems and daily company with Our Lord is stirring.

The earliest known intimate of God, after Adam and Eve before the fall, would seem to have been Moses, to whom God spoke "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (*Exodus* 30:11, Revised Standard

Version). The list of later standouts of the heart includes the likes of Francis Xavier, Padre Pio, Catherine of Siena, Rose of Lima, and Brother André of Montreal. The theology and poetry of John of the Cross, imbued with erotic imagery from the *Song of Songs*, shows us how to keep our whole affection and understanding concentrated on God. We find a ready parallel in his confederate, Teresa of Avila, who, while instructing her sisters calmly about divine love, bursts into exclamations, praises, witticisms and declarations of love to God.

To speak about intimacy with God does not entail flying up to altitudes reserved for the truly gifted. No, intimacy with Our Lord is our Christian calling. I certainly found it in my parents and among my aunts and uncles, thanks be to God. It can be palpable in the pew next to us at church, or somewhere on the block where we live, or in a store or office that we happen into.

Intimacy with the Lord expands the heart towards others. I remember the funeral of Father Victor Yanitelli, S.J., in New York City, filling Saint Ignatius Church. Yanitelli, a leading citizen of Jersey City (he was proposed at one time for mayor), did not relate to people superficially. During his funeral, the preacher looked down from the pulpit and said, "I bet every one of you is convinced that you were Father Yanitelli's best friend." He certainly had the charism, but also he put himself out for people.

According to Leona English, Father Henri Nouwen kept insisting that intimacy can only be nourished out of solitude and silence, being at home with whoever you are, "reaching inside to inner depths" ("A Close Look at Intimacy"). Only then can we be with others as true friends, English explains. She goes on: "This form of solitude sets people free, allowing them to be in the midst of turmoil and to be signs of hope and courage for others."

The intimacy of Jesus with his Father, or *abba*, with whom he communed at the slightest chance, made him the man for others par excellence. At home with who he was, totally, he could share that gift of himself with anyone. We see him intimate with Martha and Mary and "deeply perturbed" by the death of "our friend Lazarus" (John 11:11 and 33). The fact of Jesus groaning and lamenting over human suffering and being moved by compassion for the confused searching of ordinary



people is further witness of his great heart. The Beloved Disciple leaning on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper, and Mary Magdalen's strong attachment to the Teacher, seal the evidence of the openness of Jesus to others.

Concerning the saints, it helps enormously to know how many of these holy people had a real call to intimacy with one another. We can think of Francis de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal, Francis of Assisi and Clare, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, Jerome and Paula, and of course Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Catholic historians closer to our times will have numerous examples of their own. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin occur to me. All of them, standing in the embrace of God, have brought the best out of one another.

I recall the wonderful episode told me by a nun in New York City, a collaborator of mine, who was very close to a parish priest with whom she had pretty much grown up. They had agreed to meet for lunch once a year. This particular time they were in Rockefeller Center, neither of them in habit or in collar. The priest was seated there when the sister arrived, and she gave him a big kiss on the cheek. At that moment a voice from a nearby table sounded out, "Father Tracy (let us say), how good to see you!" We do live our lives inescapably in public! That does not mean, however, that we have to be stiff as boards. This was a case of normal intimacy that enhanced the dedication of each.

How many ways there are to nourish intimacy! Frank conversation no doubt rates as the chief. In my poem included here I have focused on the role often played by letters. "Communication" is a goal and activity touted everywhere these days, yet letter writing seems to be a lost art. In the heap of mail one receives daily, how often does a real letter come, recounting successes and failures, puzzlements and insights, wishes and regrets? Would there were more. Email can carry such letters, but how often does it these days?

Just as ardent and continuing prayer is the daily bread of intimacy with God, soul-sharing by letter, as well as by conversation (see *The Lost Art of Conversation* by Margaret Wheatley), can enliven the dedication of those aspiring to be God's loving servants. And to this, nothing else, are we called.

## *Last of the Scribes*

What I enjoy of you, old friend,  
is that typewriter from before the wars  
that to this day emits long letters.

You cram them out past the margins,  
full of the foibles and fate of friends,  
plus the wry disgruntlement that is you.

Those missives amid storms of mail  
are intimate as a clasp of hands.  
How sparse my note cards in return.

Our conversation is in heaven  
said an old letter writer, soul-sharing,  
passing on his faith, as do you.

- James Torrens, S.J.



# THE PEDAGOGY OF FRIENDSHIP FOR MARRIAGE

Tim Muldoon, Ph.D.



Human beings crave intimacy. The desire to reach out in love to another human being is as fundamental to well-being as is shelter. Even today, when partnering, coupling, and marrying are the subjects of a good deal of political rhetoric, what remains unquestioned is the basic observation that people seek intimacy spontaneously, in response to the promptings of the heart. What is clear, though, is that these promptings are not without difficulty, evidenced not only by the many experiences of divorce, but also by the confusion among many young people about how and why to cultivate intimate relationships in the first place. Amidst the decline of common assumptions about marriage, many young people today find themselves unmoored when they consider how they ought to engage in relationships. To put it differently: when marriage is no longer a young adult's assumed compass point, the purpose and direction of his or her relationships to others becomes unclear. One will certainly engage in certain kinds of friendships; this much seems obvious, inasmuch as the craving for intimacy impels people to get to know one another. But the deeper question is how, over the long run, young people seek to draw lessons from their experiences of friendship for the sake of forging a vocation, of a single life or marriage or some form of religious life. At some point in a young adult's life, the question must arise—either implicitly or explicitly—“how do I choose to be in relation to other people?” One more specific version of this question is “how do I choose to use my sexuality?” And in the absence of cultural modeling or personal mentoring, the default answer is that to which every adolescent will devolve: I will imitate what I see. And what they see is a culture in which temporary relationships are the norm.



There is a concern about how an embrace of the hookup model for interpersonal relationship impacts a young person's understanding of the possibilities for intimacy.

A number of recent books, such as Donna Freitas's *Sex and the Soul* (Oxford, 2008) and Laura Sessions Stepp's *Unhooked* (Riverhead, 2007), illustrate the pervasiveness of hookup culture as a substitute for real intimacy on college campuses: a culture which offers the false gratification of temporary connection (usually physical, often genital) without the time-demanding investment of real emotional energy. Hookup culture thrives on pluralistic ignorance, the pervasive belief that everyone else is having more fun than I am. It is driven by what René Girard calls mimetic desire: desire shaped less by the object desired, and more by the imitation of what those around me desire. Once upon a time, the object of desire was marriage; today, though, in the absence of a robust imagination about the possibilities of married life—perhaps as a result of the pervasiveness of divorce—the object of desire among many young people is (to put it blandly) having fun. In Aristotelian terms, we might say that with the breakdown of a clear telos which would give some meaning to the ways that young people cultivate relationships, what fills the vacuum is the relatively easy-to-find hookup.

In addition to the fact that widespread casual sex presents a concern for public health, there is a concern about how an embrace of the hookup model for interpersonal relationship impacts a young person's understanding of the possibilities for intimacy. How does one respond to a student's observation that relationships take too much time? If real relationships take one's focus away from the "important" things in life, what does that suggest about the capacity to imagine marriage as life-giving, not to mention a vital

institution in a society? More basically, what does that suggest about the possibility of developing real friendships, upon which all good marriages are based?

#### RE-IMAGINING FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE

According to Aristotle, "without friends no one would choose to live," so fundamental is it to our well-being (see his *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially books 8 and 9). But people fail in friendships just as they fail in virtue, choosing a defective form of friendship instead of putting forth the *energeia* necessary for cultivating the virtuous life upon which any real friendship must be built. Some friendships are rooted in utility: each seeks from the other something that will benefit self. Others are rooted in pleasure, in which case each friend enjoys the company of the other because of the feelings that are produced in the other's presence. We see today many examples of these kinds of relationships. Among college students, for example, relationships with classmates and roommates often fall into the first category. Hookups generally fall into the second category; Aristotle himself observed that "the friendship of young people seems to aim at pleasure; for they live under the guidance of emotion, and pursue above all what is pleasant to themselves and what is immediately before them." The problem, says Aristotle, is that these kinds of relationships are temporary, because what people use and want changes.

Aristotle suggests, however, that there is another kind of friendship which does not so easily fall prey to the vicissitudes of utility and pleasure: that among people who are good and seek virtue. The key to real friendship is living the virtuous life, or at least the life that strives to understand goodness, and to delight in the company of someone else who shares that life.

The question of how to live the virtuous life is a link connecting Aristotle to the great writers of the Christian tradition. If Aristotle is correct that true friendship depends upon shared seeking of the good, then it would seem to follow that friendship is intimately connected with the moral and spiritual life. This was precisely the thesis advanced by Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1167) in his remarkable text *Spiritual Friendship* (*De spirituali amicitia*). His primary source was Cicero's *De Amicitia*, a work that draws from Greek philosophy and perhaps even Aristotle directly. Aelred's claim that God is friendship borrows from the

theological claim of 1 John 4:16 that God is love; he develops the idea in order to suggest how the cultivation of friendship is a spiritual discipline.

A key to Aelred's meditation on friendship is his reliance on a basic Augustinian sobriety about the tendency of all people toward the corruption of otherwise good desires. The three movements of friendship—attraction, intention and fruition—all carry with them the danger of corruption. One can be attracted to the wrong person (say, the physically beautiful one rather than the one with whom one can build a life); one can intend to pursue what one knows is wrong (as in sexual gratification with no intention of a greater good for self or other); and one can enjoy a relationship in a disordered way (for example, to advance one's social capital). The spiritual life, and therefore the spiritual friendship, is predicated on the right ordering of these movements. The purification of attraction comes through the will; the exhortation to love one's enemies can thus be read as a kind of medicine for overemphasis on attraction. I suggest that the key to spiritual friendship—and by this I mean simply a friendship that is constantly growing—is the discipline of desire, rooted in a rich imagination of the possibilities of friendship itself.

What is lacking in many intimate relationships today is not desire (even though it may be defective); nor is it effort (even though it may be misplaced). Rather, what is often lacking today is imagination. My guess, though unscientific, is that this lack stems from the fact that many young people do not cultivate imagination, but are rather force-fed through TV, video games, ipods, Youtube, and so on. And in the absence of opportunities to practice the skills of building intimate relationships through dating (which for many is archaic), they stumble from one defective friendship to another without a strong sense of how to deepen and expand them in ways that are, over the long haul, life-giving and, in a word, sacramental—in the broadest sense of being revelatory of God.

Aelred's work is a resource for re-imagining friendship and, by extension, marriage. In a monastic world in which particular friendships were often seen as suspect, he offered a new way of conceiving of friendship as a deeply sacramental practice, a way of living a life of love that manifested God's own Trinitarian life. The foundation of his doctrine is that friendship is itself a participation in the divine life: a response to the invitation of God to share in the

In contrast to relationships that grow out of attraction, of feelings and emotions which may come and go, the true friendship that is rooted in constantly renewed acts of will holds endless possibilities.

overflowing of love characteristic of Trinitarian interrelationship. One implication we might draw from this basic idea is that in friendship—in the ups and downs, the warp and woof of ordinary shared human life—there is already an experience of encounter with God. In contrast to relationships that grow out of attraction, of feelings and emotions which may come and go, the true friendship that is rooted in constantly renewed acts of will holds endless possibilities. In particular, the experience of conflict, which is inevitable in any friendship, can be seen not as the end of the relationship, but rather as a difficult hill in the middle of a long yet rewarding journey.

Perhaps most importantly, Aelred's suggestion that "God is friendship" de-centers the individual. Individual feelings at a given moment in the relationship are not as important as the larger story in which each partner plays a part. The story is not about me: what I'm feeling, how I'm being fulfilled, what I'm getting out of the relationship. Instead, the story is about the friendship itself, how I participate with the other in an unfolding drama where God is the key actor. The questions are different: what is God doing? How is God challenging me to grow? What is God revealing to me about myself, about the other? Such a de-centering can be liberating, in the sense that it allows me freedom to grow, instead of being limited by my own self-interest and especially my own often unruly emotions.

What Aelred writes about friendship is equally true about marriage, if not more so. In Catholic tradition, reflection on marriage began with the understanding that it is a natural human endeavor, good in itself, which Christ blessed and "raised to the dignity of a



There is, then, a need for some kind of recovery of practices that guide young adults through the deeper experiences of friendship and love.

sacrament,” in the language of canon law. From the perspective of Catholic teaching, the key difference between spiritual friendship and marriage is the latter’s public nature. Friendship is a private matter between two people; in marriage, the matter is brought before the community, in order that it might officially and permanently recognize the friendship. Canon law and liturgical celebration serve to remind both the couple and the community that the marriage is no longer a matter of private interest; it is for the community a public symbol of not only the couple’s participation in the divine life, but also the couple’s symbolizing for the community the way that Christ loves the Church. It is a friendship made sacred not only because of the love shared between husband and wife—a love which overcomes the divide (*sexus*) between men and women because of sin—but also because that love is a public symbol, a sacrament.

#### THE PEDAGOGY OF FRIENDSHIP

How can friends come to the decision to make their lives into a public symbol? What is the motivation for pursuing marriage, when at face value it would seem so much easier to simply enjoy the fruits of a good friendship? More basically, why even pursue a spiritual friendship at all, if it requires energy and time and willingness to undergo difficult growth? These are the kinds of questions latent in the experiences of many young people today.

For Aelred, as for Augustine (upon whom Aelred relied heavily), the key is understanding the nature of human desire. Temporary friendships—even those

where there may be the excitement of sexual energy or shared passions—simply don’t satisfy. The desire of the human heart is to love and to be loved, and so the limited or temporary experience of love is wounding—in fact, it is not really love at all, but rather a defective form of relationship rooted not in will but emotion. Only a love that is rooted in a shared desire for that which transcends what is temporary can satisfy the heart. On a practical level, we can observe that no one likes being rejected, and no one starts a friendship expecting that it will end soon. Both Aristotle and Aelred recognize that there are certainly friendships which are not truly intimate; not all friendships need to be truly intimate spiritual friendships. Yet in seeking a person with whom we can share our entire lives, we necessarily seek permanence, the security of knowing that the other will always be present. It is precisely that desire for permanence that leads people to make their intimate friendships into marriage, a public symbol by which others know that their relationship is an inviolable trust.

To grow toward this kind of life commitment takes time. The great pilgrimage of adolescence is the discernment of how to love: how to recognize the roots of desire, the perversion of desire, and the objects of desire, both in self and others. In childhood, one learns from parents and extended family how to relate to others. One is taught manners and basic skills of relationship-building. Today, unlike the practices of a generation ago, “play dates” are one way that young children develop practices of relationship. Interestingly, though, during the same period in which a kind of dating has become the norm for young children, the practice has almost entirely faded away from adolescence.

There is, then, a need for some kind of recovery of practices that guide young adults through the deeper experiences of friendship and love. The older terms like dating, courtship, and betrothal, the notion of the suitor and the sought—these point us to ways that prior generations sought to give structure to the natural desires of young people, and to guide them toward decisions that were more than simply passing flights of emotional fantasy. Perhaps it is too much to anticipate that families will arrange marriages—even though some data suggest that such marriages tend to be more permanent. But it is reasonable to imagine ways that churches, schools and colleges, for example, might help young people to navigate the complexities of

friendship-forming, and perhaps even romance. A colleague of mine has with great success included in one of her courses an assignment that requires students to go on a date; she even provides rules that help them to share very clear, reasonable, and creative expectations. A group of college students I know have recently formed a dating service, precisely with the hope that it will provide an alternative to the default party scene. Faculty and administrators can aid in these efforts by beginning to think expansively about how they might help young people to develop skills and confidence in reaching out authentically to their peers—face-to-face, and not through technology.

There is no better preparation for marriage than learning how to forge and sustain real friendships. Our culture has a myth of the young romance, and indeed since at least the Middle Ages in the West there is a vast and beautiful literature of young love. What we lack

today, though, in contrast to the literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans, is a robust myth of friendship that might help cultivate imagination of why seeking and sustaining a deep, intimate friendship might be salutary for the soul. In the absence of such a myth, expectations of marriage look more like expectations for romance, including its fleeting nature. A great challenge for educators today is that of encouraging a pedagogy of friendship as a preparation for marriage.



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# The Presence and Absence of God

Mary Rose Bumpus, R.S.M., Ph.D.



There are eight children in my family, if you don't count those persons my parents *unofficially* adopted along the way. We grew up together in a small house, six girls sleeping in one bedroom on three sets of bunk beds, my brothers in the den. We are as different as night and day; yet we respect each other and thoroughly enjoy being together. I am the oldest of this Catholic tribe. As a member of a religious community, the Sisters of Mercy, I have no children of my own. So I am particularly fond of hearing the stories of my siblings' children.

Rusty and Patricia, my youngest sister, have two children—a daughter named Raia, and a son, Sean. Shortly after Christmas a few years ago, Patricia called to tell me about an experience of five-year-old Raia. Patricia related their family custom of meeting with the children in November and asking them what they wanted for Christmas. They are allowed to ask for three things “since other children need things too.” Raia requested a life-sized doll house. She quickly learned her desire was not realistic, and Patricia asked her to think of something else she might like. After a moment or two of silence, Raia said: “Mommy, I know what I want for Christmas!” “What’s that?” “I want lots of love!” On Christmas Eve, Raia’s parents cut out many bright red paper hearts. They put the name of someone who loved Raia on each heart. They sprinkled the hearts on the floor all around the Christmas tree and made a trail of hearts up the stairway to Raia’s door. When Raia ran downstairs on Christmas morning, she shouted: “Mommy, mommy, look! I got lots of love for Christmas!”

I was immediately touched by my sister's story. I am certain I had some felt response, but I did not stop to reflect before I spoke. I simply uttered, "That's beautiful, Patricia, from a five-year-old child!" The moment passed, and I thought little more about this event.

Many Christians have experiences similar to my own. Some thing or event captures our attention, but we soon move away from it or forget it altogether. It is easy in a world like ours for the Spirit of God to effectively draw near and pass by unnoticed or unrecognized. But something bid me to return to the conversation with my sister. I began to ponder, was God not present in our exchange?

As I reflected, I started to perceive how our conversation was replete with gifts. My sister and her family were present to me, even in our absence from one another. I came to know Patricia and Rusty as people of faith attempting to instill gospel values in their children. I was overcome with joy at the wonder, the spontaneity of Raia, and I was sad that I did not see her at Christmas. I marveled that a five-year-old child could name so clearly a desire that is ultimate to human life—the desire for love. She was completely guileless and trusting in her request, and I began to see something of what the gospel means when Jesus enjoins us to become "like little children."

Still, I do not fully understand nor can I communicate the impact of this experience. There is something here beyond expression, something I cannot name, something I would call ultimate mystery. Can my niece occasionally be stubborn, selfish, or hurtful to others? Yes. Yet this child's heartfelt expression is reflective of God's indwelling presence and the ongoing life of the Spirit. In this particular moment, she made visible to me what is always there—the love-life that is the fabric of her being. I experienced this life of love, and it brought joy and healing to my heart. Such are the effects of the Holy Spirit, such is grace.

In the Christian tradition, the Holy Spirit is identified as the immanent presence of God, God present and active in the world, the God who draws near and is effective. As Elizabeth Ann Johnson said, the presence of God is made known to us through the effects of the Spirit: "new life and energy, peace and justice, resistance and liberation, hope against hope, wisdom, courage, and all that goes with love, there is the presence

The Spirit helps us to notice when we are truly free, when we are most alive, when we are able to love or let go of something, to live in the truth. Such moments constitute the universal experience of grace.

of the Spirit" (p. 122). Sometimes the effects of the Spirit are writ large, sometimes writ small. Always the effects of the Spirit are revealed through our ordinary life experience.

However, it is not uncommon for people of good faith to fail to recognize God's presence in their ordinary lives. We see this in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Samuel runs to Eli when he hears his name being called and says, "Here I am." But the astute Eli responds, "Samuel, if this One calls you, you shall say, 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening'" (1 Samuel 3:1-9). Mary Magdalene perceives Jesus in the one she thought was the gardener while Peter, John, and the other disciples experience Jesus on the lake shore as a fry cook.

Though we fail at times to recognize God's presence, the hidden Spirit constantly bids us to become aware, to pay attention to those experiences that captivate our minds and hearts. The Spirit helps us to notice when we are truly free, when we are most alive, when we are able to love or let go of something, to live in the truth. Such moments constitute the universal experience of grace. So, first we notice. Then, we reflect upon such experiences in the light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we do so, the God who seemed hidden becomes *coknown* to us (Rahner, pp. 19-23). It is like looking at two sides of the same coin. We look at one side and encounter our experience of freedom or truth or love. We look at the other side, and we see the presence of God.



When we befriend inner darkness  
as well as light—and recognize the  
capacity of both to bestow life—dark  
times become times of expectant waiting.

It is important to pay attention to those moments that captivate us, to reflect upon them, and to live in their light. Reflecting upon such experiences evokes gratitude in us, comforts us in the midst of life's struggles and difficulties, and challenges us to grow in love of God and neighbor. By responding to the Spirit's bidding to enter such experiences more fully, the unseen God is made visible to us, and we come to abide more clearly and consciously in God's loving presence.

#### THE FELT ABSENCE OF GOD

At times, however, God does not become clearly visible to us, and we experience the felt absence of God. Our spiritual journeys often move to a rhythm through which we experience the presence and absence of God. This rhythm resembles the dance of light and darkness passing over the face of the earth. We know that if the entire earth were always bathed in sun, the life-sustaining processes that go on in the dark would not and could not happen. When we befriend inner darkness as well as light—and recognize the capacity of both to bestow life—dark times become times of expectant waiting. Such a sense of absence draws us toward fidelity and trust in the constancy of God's presence.

Sometimes in the spiritual journey God's absence descends upon us like a dark cloud, and we feel bereft and alone. Such experiences seem particularly prevalent during moments of loss and grief. This was true for me when my mother died. At the time I was

in my mid-forties and could not understand my inner response to her death; I felt like a faithless person. My siblings had altogether different experiences around our mother's death. Some spoke about how much better off Mom was because she had been suffering from Alzheimer's. Others spoke about her new life in God. Still others told me of the conversations they were having with Mom now that she was in heaven. All the while I was thinking to myself, "I must have no faith whatsoever. I don't know how Mom is, where she is, that she is, or anything else. All I know is that she is completely and totally absent from this place." This was the only certainty that was present to me. I was grief stricken, and in that place, I felt God was nowhere to be found.

I struggled for many months after Mom died; more significantly, there seemed to be no one to talk with about such things. One day, with fear and trepidation, and feeling like my lack of faith was written all over me, I asked to see the faculty advisor of my theological studies. I told her I was struggling over the death of my mother, and said: "Would you say something intelligible to me about the resurrection?" To her credit and God's everlasting grace, she said little about the resurrection. Rather, she began talking about how she experienced the death of her own mother. She spoke about the finality of death and the absoluteness of our inability to communicate with those who have died in the way we had always communicated with them, as embodied, enfleshed human beings. She then described for me the early Christian community's experience of the death of Jesus—how absolute and final his death felt to the disciples. She recounted how Mary Magdalene went to the tomb just to see the body, the figure of Jesus, once again. But Jesus was absent. He was not there. Mary Magdalene mourned, not having even this painful consolation. My advisor told me the proclamation of the resurrection could not be fully understood apart from the early Christian community's experience of the finality of the death of Jesus. Only then could resurrection be intelligible at all. At the end of our conversation, my advisor asked me a single memorable question: "Can anything kill the human spirit?"

In my time of significant loss, I experienced God in the person of another who accompanied me in my suffering and did not take my suffering lightly. My professor showed me how my experience of my mother's

death not only fit within, but is a very important part of, the Christian tradition. I felt connected and consoled, not the faithless person I had imagined, and my loneliness disappeared. I drew hope from this woman and from others, and for a time my faith rested upon their faith. Today, many people of faith are thirsting for this kind of knowledge of God and for such an experience of the body of Christ.

At times in the spiritual journey, God's absence seems like an overwhelming, threatening darkness, and we feel completely forsaken or abandoned. Such absence is often felt in the face of radical suffering. Jesus had a pervasive experience of God's absence in his suffering and death on the cross, and he cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Sandra Schneiders points out that at the same time, Jesus was a human being who was "totally taken over by the Spirit of God" such that "no corner of his life was untouched by the life of the Spirit." How, then, do we account for Jesus' experience of God's absence? We can only say that the experience of feeling forsaken by God must be a truly spiritual experience. This is exactly what the suffering and death of Jesus allow us to say. We do experience the absence of God in our lives, and the cross allows us and challenges us to be present to this reality of human experience. The cross is the place where such suffering is never taken lightly. It is the place we cry out: "I cannot see you." "I am not free." "I feel angry, bereft, forsaken, and inconsolable." "Where are you, O God?"

Suffering that is the result of great injustice, suffering experienced in solitude, suffering wrongly experienced at the hands of others, is radical and unspeakable suffering. Such suffering is often accompanied by a sense that God, the One to whom we have entrusted our very selves, has forsaken us. Radical suffering makes us cry out "Why?" Yet, as Simone Weil asserts, if the question *why* actually "expressed the search for a cause, the reply would appear easily." But the question *why* does not express the search for a cause. Rather, "it expresses the search for an *end*" (emphasis added). When we accept the reality of our human existence, we acknowledge the destructive as well as the benevolent character of the natural world. We know that illness, human frailty, and death are the natural rhythms of life. We realize that suffering degradations of poverty, racism, war, and strife are the result of our own

We do experience the absence of God in our lives, and the cross allows us and challenges us to be present to this reality of human experience.

inhumanity. But the question remains: Is there anything redemptive about human suffering? How will our sufferings be alleviated? When will they cease? What is the meaning of it all?

Radical suffering may reduce us to silence, a place where discourse and action are no longer possible. Feelings for others die. Life is suffused with a sense of powerlessness and helplessness. Radical suffering—the suffering of concentration camps, the violence of war, inhumane forms of physical, sexual, and emotional mistreatment at the hands of others—can make us mute. In the face of such suffering, the cry of Jesus—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—becomes an imperative for the Christian community. Jesus' cry of abandonment demands our presence. His cry challenges us to be the embodied reality of Christ in the world, to live in solidarity with those who suffer. Wherever we can, we give voice to the affliction we see around us so that others might find the capacity for speech. We act so that others might become agents of their own lives. This is the paradoxical reality of the cross.

#### PRESENCE, ABSENCE, AND ULTIMATE MYSTERY

We all love, and we all suffer. When our sufferings make us mute, the Spirit cries out to God interceding for us "with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:14-17, 26-27). And when the absence of God seems so prevalent that there is nothing to love, Simone Weil urges us "to go on loving in the emptiness, or at least ... go on wanting to love, though it may only be with an infinitesimal part" of the self (*Waiting for God*, p. 121). It is this desire to love, God's imprint on the human heart, that sustains us.



Jesus was sustained in his suffering by his desire to love. We also see this desire in others who are dying. A dying woman stays alive until her grandchild is born. She suffers in order to love. We are united in the sufferings of Jesus Christ when loving, or the desire to love, sustains us. When we love in the midst of suffering, even though we receive no reply to the question, one day we will hear "the very silence as something infinitely more full of significance than any response," something like God speaking (Weil, *Intimations*, p. 199).

#### INVITATION TO TRUST

As Christians we experience, just as Jesus did, both the presence and absence of God. This is a paradoxical mystery of Christian faith. For in truth, we profess that God is everywhere and always present, even in felt absence. In light of this truth, we respond to the Spirit's bidding to reflect upon God's presence in our daily life. But we also acknowledge, name, and give expression to another truth of the Christian life, the experienced absence of God. This truth invites us to trust in God's presence in the midst of darkness and to rely upon the faith of others in times of need. This truth invites us to cry out to the living God and to continue to love even when we are unable to cry out. In all of this, we are united in the sufferings of Christ and in the hope of resurrection, and we encounter the incomprehensible mystery of God. For it is in this Mystery—not distance or remoteness or a puzzle to be solved—but in inexpressible, unknown, otherness, that we place our trust.

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# *For a Departing Brother:*

## A Letter and Some Further Reflections



George Wilson, S.J.

Dear "Joe,"

Last weekend I was back in town for a school celebration. Naturally I had hoped I would get a chance to see you and have at least a brief visit to see how things were going for you. So when I inquired at table whether you might be around, I was disappointed to hear that you had decided to separate from the Society.

My disappointment, I admit, arises out of my own self-interest. Our enjoyable experiences together at community events in recent years had led me to hope that there would be many more as our paths crossed in the future. That, alas, is not to be.

My better, more disinterested self is focused on you and your future. I assume that you have had solid spiritual accompaniment in your discernment. So I have good reason to trust that you are at peace in your decision. My experience over the years with others who have "left" the Society assures me that you will continue to pursue the Ignatian vision in whatever arena you eventually find yourself. For me that is far more important than canonical companionship. You may not walk the path within touching distance but we're still walking it together. As the unofficial motto of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps puts it, by your life with us you are "ruined forever!"

So thank you for the years of your valuable young life that you have given to sharing in our canonical company.

These first years of finding yourself once again as a lay person will have their own stresses. Especially in light of the financial burdens you will now have to bear in pursuit of your degree. Be assured of my prayer. The Lord who led you to the Society, and now leads you forth from it, remains faithful. Go easy on yourself.

Pray for me, that the Lord will hold me focused on our shared mission and not on "perseverance in religious life."

Peace, brother!  
George



I would suspect that many religious might not write such a letter if they heard that someone with whom they had shared significant portions of life had “left the community.” As a matter of fact, at an earlier stage of my own life my reaction to such a piece of news would not have taken that form, either. That fact compels me to explore the attitudes reflected in the letter, and beyond the attitudes, some of the theology and spirituality it represents.

## ATTITUDES

In that earlier era soon after “the Council,” when so many religious felt called to separate from their communities, the shock of hearing that someone had left often resulted, for me, in anger. At times I was quite bitter. In the case of men who had become more than fellow Jesuits—lifelong friends, really—it sometimes took me years to be able to be comfortable in their company.

Would my response be characterized as being rooted in a sense of *betrayal*? That’s a harsh word. It has overtones of dishonesty, of being actively misled by the overt signs that nothing was amiss and we could go off into the sunset together (the operative word being “together”). The realization of *separation* was there, for sure. Loss. But I don’t think I could bring myself to say that a friend who was leaving had actually been dishonest in not sharing with me his struggle. Still, honesty might suggest that the thought could have been down inside me, just too painful to name.

I now suspect that there was a certain component of fear at work in my reactions. What did his departure tell me about *my own* future? If that most admirable fellow couldn’t “persevere”—more of that language later—how would I make it?

At this distance it’s clear to me that the whole complex bundle of feelings, whether acknowledged or not, was focused on me and what I was losing rather than on what “Joe” was going through. In explanation (but not justification) I suppose that in the face of such a traumatic experience of loss the initial response would naturally be for us to want to crawl into a corner and lick our pain. We’re animals, after all. The ability to forget ourselves—to die to self, as spiritual writing puts it—and stand within the skin of the other person develops very slowly for most of us. It comes only with a lot of care and attentiveness—and costly stretching. It is liberating eventually to see light, but it can also be difficult to let go of the self-justifying comfort of darkness.

## THE SKIN OF THE OTHER

The men and women who have peopled our religious lives for these past decades, who took the same step as we in entering religious life and then felt called to leave it, were people of integrity. They were following their highest spirits and ideals—indeed, *the* Spirit. After the fact, we learned that many had wrestled a long time with the decision to take another path, before coming to terms with what eventually became the right choice for them.

How difficult that process of separating from the community in which they had spent precious years of their lives was for them, I’m sure I can never fully appreciate it. I do know that at the time of their departure that aspect of the whole story—their pain—was deep in the background of my radar, if not completely off the screen. And although the immediacy of my own discomfort explains much of that absence, I’m not sure it gives the whole answer. Institutional signals—the language of the system (think: “leaving”) and its protective practices (think: men being slipped out the back door when everyone was in chapel, avoiding awkward scenes)—surely played their part. Religious communities share the characteristics of all organizations: they are inherently conservative, and therefore self-protective. They seem by their nature quite good at developing mechanisms that distance us from the personally painful. It’s not a defect, I think; simply their nature as institutions. Still, we need to be aware of the reality. Being shielded from painful realities can stunt our personal growth. Confronting reality exacts a price but it can be the occasion for gaining new depth.

## THEN THERE ARE THE ECONOMIC REALITIES

Of all the consequences that flow from a man or woman’s decision to take a different fork in the road, the sheer economic realities must be close to the top of the list. In the letter to “Joe” I try to empathize with him about the financial hurdle he faces. How well have we religious attended to that aspect of someone’s departure? It could be instructive if someone were to research the practices of different communities when a member “leaves” after contributing five, ten, twenty, or more years to the life and ministry of the group. What resources do communities provide when someone leaves? What does justice call for? Charity? Whatever

may be the issues of equity at stake in the situation, I know that in the past I personally failed to appreciate the difficult economic consequences faced by fellow religious upon their separation.

Economics are one thing; gratitude, though, is another matter. If it was the responsibility of superiors to figure out equitable economic standards for the departing member, sheer thanks for what the man or woman had given us is surely incumbent on the rest of us as members. In order to share the life of the community “Joe” left a lot of other goods on the table—perhaps for many years. He made an investment in us. No matter how we view what he is doing when he takes a different turn, he deserves our gratitude for all he shared along the way.

Unfortunately that apparently simple conclusion seems often to escape us. I know of at least one instance in which a fellow member wrote such a letter of thanks to one of his brothers when the man was leaving the community. Some years later the former member reported how much the simple gesture had meant to him. He had never forgotten it. It had all the more meaning for him since it had been the only one anyone in the community had written to him at that lonely time.

## “LEAVING”

From the letter and the quotation marks I have been using in reference to the reality of separation, the reader will conclude, rightly, that my experience suggests that we need better language to describe what is really occurring in many instances. To put the issue plainly: what are we saying when we say such a man or woman “left” the community?

In my work over the years I have encountered a host of men and women we call “former religious.” In most instances they prove to be admirable individuals still fully committed to the mission their community had called them to undertake. Whether married or single, they plug away at education or health care or social service—driven by a spirituality they absorbed from the community they had “left.” The attitudinal and visionary imprinting they had received in the community is occasionally so strong that when we meet such a person it is easy to guess that he or she had once been a Benedictine or Franciscan, Dominican or Ignatian, etc. It shows up in subtle ways the person may not even be aware of. One example: it is a rare former

We are all shaped by the people with whom we’ve knelt and prayed.

Maryknoller who isn’t invested in some work or project of an international nature. The parish PTO may claim some of such people’s time, but by comparison with projects or issues overseas, it tends to rank low on their list of significant engagements. We are all shaped by the people with whom we’ve knelt and prayed.

Each of our religious communities challenges us to be committed to its particular embodiment of Christian mission. Isn’t it a bit strange, then, to say they “left” when they are still engaged in that same mission, sometimes with an intensity of commitment that might embarrass some of us canonically religious? When we say Joe “left” the community we can only be referring to his separation from a canonically recognized state. It would be arrogant if we were to conclude from the fact of his departure that he has lost his sense of commitment to the community’s vision and mission. Our language should communicate only that he is being called to pursue it in a new form of life—a new way of embodying the mission.

## THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

I suspect that some readers may be uneasy at my letter for other reasons, however. Reasons of a more theological or spiritual nature. Does it trivialize or relativize the seriousness of perpetual vows?

I don’t think so. Note that at the moment when I am writing to Joe his decision to separate has already been made. If he were sharing with me an unresolved struggle to find the Lord’s will for him and had not yet reached his decision, my answer would have been quite



different. As it is, my letter doesn't encourage him to decide to leave, it begins from the fact that he is already in a new state. How he arrived at that choice is a sacred mystery, for sure, between him and the Lord. But his choice is now not just a possible option, it is a present reality. Before such a reality I can only remove my sandals; it is sacred ground. (One definition of sanctity describes saints as those who have the courage to confront reality. Easy to say; excruciating to achieve.)

A close reader will not let me off that easily, however. What does my letter imply about our God—and God's way of dealing with us? How is it possible to say that it was "God's will" to call a man or woman to perpetual commitment in a religious community—and then that it was God's will for him or her to depart? That sounds either too easy, or even a contradiction.

It's a serious question and deserves a serious answer. Here's a fumbling effort:

Looking back after many years of prayer and study I have begun to wonder whether the traditional idea of permanency might need some further elaboration. Was it unconsciously based on the concept, not of the One whom Jesus called Father, but rather of the God of the Greek and Roman philosophers—unchanging and impassive and untouched by our story?

I begin to suspect that when we highlight the perpetual character of religious vows (or of marriage, for that matter), we are indeed naming a characteristic we hope and expect in the spirit of the human agent. But have we unconsciously fallen into an unwarranted conclusion about the Lord's end of the relationship? Do we really believe we have the power to place limits on what God can do or ask? No matter how fervent is our intention at the moment of taking vows?

My evolving appreciation of the reality of the incarnation, and especially the resurrection of the Lord, leads me to a different perspective. If we take incarnation—enfleshment of divinity in the time-limited, localized body of Jesus—seriously, change is inevitably a significant piece of the puzzle. Jesus is constantly and unchangingly led by the Spirit, true. But that leading does not free him from decisions *in*

*the moment* that are "right" but still subject to reassessment—under the guidance of the same Spirit—when he confronts changed circumstances. We eviscerate the reality of his humanity when we imagine his obedience to a divine "plan" as some disincarnate, once-for-all act of acceptance of unyielding "reality." When he says his joy is to "do the will" of his Father do we imagine him donning an a-temporal straitjacket? Does not full respect for the dignity of his human nature lead rather to a *moment-by-moment attitude* of openness to the mystery of the Father's love as *manifested in the circumstances of a constantly evolving world*?

To speak of "perseverance in religious life" could be a form of idolatry. As sinners we are beset by the eternal temptation to reify unfolding mystery, to turn God into a static "thing" instead of a person engaging us in a relationship. If there is to be anything "permanent" in the life of a finite creature who is always in pilgrimage on this earth, it seems to me that it is only the here-and-now *re-commitment* we are empowered to make to a God who is disclosed in circumstances that may have changed drastically since yesterday. No matter our highest aspirations to unyielding fidelity, we remain historical agents engaged with a God whose love is not some etherealized abstraction but a passion that uses constantly changing manifestations to draw us into an act of here-and-now free response.

Maybe the best image for what's going on is that of a dance. Joe is still in the dance. The same dance as each of us who are still "in the community," with the same Lord.

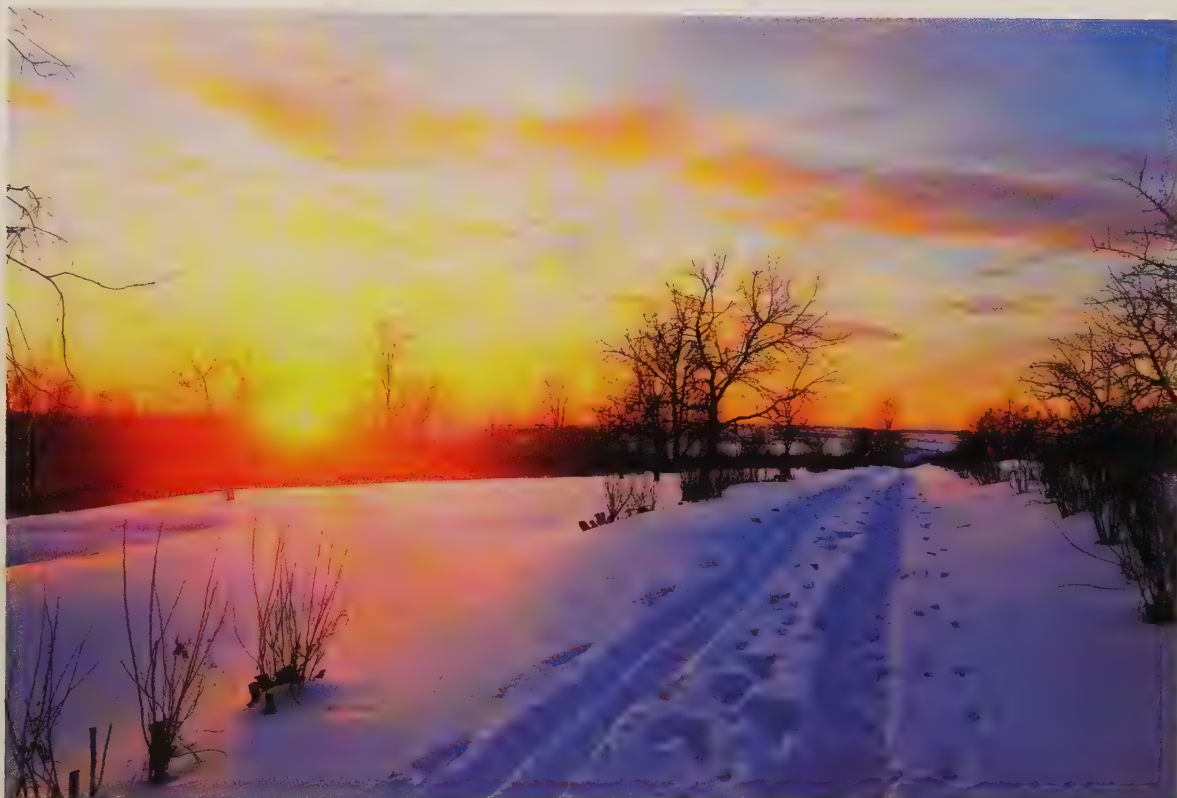
Joe just happens to be doing it on a different floor.



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# Religion as a *Path* to Emotional Well-Being

Patrick Lynch, S.J. and Carol A. Munschauer, Ph.D.



Historically, many theorists of emotional development have described various ways in which individuals achieve happiness, fulfillment and “self actualization,” to use Maslow's term. In fact, currently, there is a whole new science on the study of happiness called Positive Psychology spawned by Martin Seligman. This theory is now the subject of research articles, books, magazines and Internet sites, e.g. <http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu> or <http://www.positivepsychology.org>. Sometimes it seems to be usurping the long-time tradition held since Freud on the more dysphoric affects, such as depression, melancholy and aggression.

Carol Munschauer, a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst, co-authored a book with Dave Hood, a children's videographer. In *How to Bounce Back When You Think You Can't: The P.R.I.D.E. Factor* (AuthorHouse, 2004), they present a unique and “usable” model for creating, maintaining, or restoring one's sense of well-being. This model is based on the work of Heinz Kohut and others in the field of Self Psychology. It is new, in that it uses a contemporary understanding of healthy child development to suggest ways people of all ages can be aware of, even on the lookout for, potential sources of well-being, and how they might be able, once so educated, to actively search out these experiences.



FIGURE 1

### The Psychological Nutrition Pyramid



Munschauer presents the details of her model in the form of the Psychological Nutrition Pyramid which is based on the Food Nutrition Pyramid. In her Psychological Nutrition Pyramid (Figure 1) she has illustrated the basic developmental needs of childhood starting at the bottom of the pyramid with the earliest, most basic needs and developing upward through the age groups to the most sophisticated needs at the top of the pyramid.

For instance, the first need we have is connectedness, or belonging; the next need is for mirroring, or affirmation. The next need we have is for twinship, followed by idealization. Then, assuming we have been lucky enough to have had all these needs met by our families and the contexts in which we grew up, we will also need a little sparring, asserting our strength or commitment to a person or cause. This article will further elaborate on these needs as it progresses.

It should be repeated, however, that in childhood, these needs can be met along a spectrum of satisfaction from very poorly to "good enough" (Winnicott) to successfully. As children, we can only be passive in this regard. Hopefully, we have many of them met well-enough to proceed from the bottom to the top of the pyramid and therefore to become happy and fulfilled-enough individuals who pass through life feeling integrated and with few periods of alienation. It should be noted that just as we never outgrow our nutritional need for proteins or carbohydrates, we never outgrow any of the needs on the Psychological Nutrition Pyramid. Whether we are 9 or 90, we still seek fulfillment of all the needs in the pyramid from the bottom up. Just the amount needed varies for each person every day.

This model is not simply a passive one of need satisfaction. For example, it is not about needs being met or good things being given to us by chance. This random receiving mostly happens to children in their development and depends on the kind of parents they have or the circumstances of their upbringing. But this model also adds an active dimension. This active dimension is where Munschauer's model differs from other models.

### THE ACTIVE DIMENSION

The main difference between childhood and adulthood is that in adulthood we can be active on our own behalf. Supposedly, we are not just subjected to the happenstance of someone else's decision to meet our needs or not. Munschauer's Psychological Nutrition Pyramid takes the same needs of child development, which are never outgrown, and uses them as guide posts for active coping skills for a happy and healthy adult life. These are not actual things to do, but experiences to seek. For example, we need to search out experiences where we feel as if we belong, experiences where we feel as if we have encountered someone else like ourselves.

The activity of Munschauer's model is akin to the physical exercise added to the Food Nutrition Pyramid. The message that comes through is that to achieve well-being one has to work actively to receive both physical and psychological benefits. Physically, one needs to take responsibility for consuming items in each of the food groups and engage in physical exercise. Psychologically we as adults need to expose ourselves to people and situations that can provide experiences that will enrich our lives and create emotional health. It is something we have to make happen; it does not happen to us automatically.

Religion can be a very strong contributor to a person's sense of emotional well-being. There are many aspects of faith and religious practice that can fill all of the basic human needs, if a person is open to it. Although we do not claim that growth in holiness necessarily follows these steps, successfully meeting these various needs should permit a person to feel more whole and thereby be more open to God's invitation to relationship. Correlatively, we propose that if a person feels close to God and to other people of faith, she or he will also feel more secure.

This article will follow the sequence of Munschauer's Psychological Nutrition Pyramid. We will

Illustrate how the experiencing of religious activities, especially those in the Catholic Christian tradition, can help us to become more fulfilled, and to use Maslow's term, "self-actualized."

## CONNECTION

The fundamental, most basic human need at the base and the biggest section of the pyramid is connection, the need to be with and to relate to other human beings. This need begins at birth and stretches throughout the whole life cycle. Research shows that infants actually fail to thrive, or die, if they do not have connection, and the elderly die earlier if they are deprived of it.

Connection is about joining with others in our humanity. It is basically what happens when we become members of a faith community or church. The connection to an organized religious community facilitates the potential of one uniting with God and also coming closer to a particular community of the faithful. Being united in belief systems and ritual actions, such as the Catholic Mass, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, or the Bar/Bat Mitzvah of Judaism, creates a group cohesion that is sustaining for the basic needs of the individual.

As our lives continue, the need for connection is nurtured through meeting other members of the religious community. This can occur in a local place of worship or in settings elsewhere where people from many parts of the world come to worship such as Rome, Jerusalem, or Mecca. Attendance at the activities of the group, whether they be strictly social like a pot-luck dinner or a dance, or more religious like a Mass, a puja, or a Sabbath service, also promote connection. Becoming more connected with the group reduces one's anxieties and feelings of loneliness.

## MIRRORING

Another need in the pyramid is that of mirroring or affirmation, i.e., the universal need to be loved, liked, or admired by others. This starts at the earliest stage of human development when a mother communicates to her child that she or he is the apple of her eye. As we mature, the affirmation becomes more subtle. A lover might say, "You are the one and only person for me!" At other times, we might feel affirmed by people telling us

Potentially the deepest form of affirmation is sensing through prayer that God loves us.

how successful we are, applauding a talk that we gave, giving us a promotion, or publishing one of our papers. Potentially the deepest form of affirmation is sensing through prayer that God loves us. Forgiving a person who has hurt us can mirror their sense of worth and affirm their dignity.

The Biblical assertion that humans are made in God's image is the most basic type of affirmation (Genesis 1:26-27). The celebration of marriage in which a couple affirm and confirm their love for each other can be an official ceremony that validates each partner's love for the other. The funeral service, which affirms belief in the afterlife, comforts the grieving, connects them with the Communion of Saints, and mirrors with the Apostle Paul the common belief that life has not ended with earthly death (cf. 1 Corinthians 15). The basic message is: the more the person is affirmed, the more likely she or he is to feel loveable.

## TWINSHIP

Another human need is twinship, i.e., the kinship or sharing of values and beliefs with people whom we experience as like "us." We can see the need for twinship very vividly in teens and pre-teens who need to dress the same, wear the same designer labels, have the same hair style and pierce the same body parts, many times to the distress and chagrin of their parents. In development young people naturally move from being "chips off the old block" to clones of their peer group to twinship in more sophisticated forms. When we join clubs or political parties or groups of college alumni/ae, we are enjoying the special belonging and security that twinship brings.



If our needs for connection, affirmation,  
and twinship are met, we then develop  
a need for idealization or heroes.

Religion and the churches can also be the source of rich kinship experiences. The most obvious is the shared set of beliefs and values that bond people together in their faith. Meeting together at the same time and in the same place with people of like beliefs and then eating ritual foods or celebrating a Mass together can provide emotional strength in times of celebration and even during the greatest disasters. By fasting together or being in a *minyan* people may also have twinship experiences.

In addition, twinship is fostered by initiating others—or others initiating us—into a religion, as happens with RCIA programs and religious education classes. Christianity also has the long tradition of imitating Christ that goes back to the apostle Paul (1 Thessalonians 1:5-7) and was made popular during the Renaissance by Thomas á Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*.

The importance of twinship may be best seen in the action that some people take to shun others. The Church of the Latter Day Saints and some of the more conservative Christian churches have such a practice for those members who do not follow the community's rules. The Christian Scriptures speak of such an action in Matthew's speech to his community about those who offend (Matthew 18:15-17). Fundamentalist Muslims are even stronger in their rejection of those adherents who refuse to accept their beliefs and values by threatening death and even killing those whom they apprehend. The practice of suttee in Hinduism, i.e., a wife's self-immolation on her husband's funeral pyre, is yet another extreme example of twinship from a religious perspective.

If our needs for connection, affirmation, and twinship are met, we then develop a need for idealization or heroes. From our heroes we gain borrowed strength to face our crises. This need is often met in the early stages of our lives by a son looking up to his father, a daughter to her mother, or grandchildren looking up to their grandparents and always with the often unspoken fantasy that someday I can grow up to be like him or her.

In the secular realm we see this need met in many instances. Americans gained strength from Franklin Roosevelt's Depression-era mantra "We have nothing to fear but fear itself" as did the British from Winston Churchill's speeches during World War II. In our own day people gained much confidence from watching Lieutenant General Russel Honore striding through the streets of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, assuring people that the forces under his command would bring help to those in need in that heavily flooded city. After the tragedy of September 11, 2001 Rudy Giuliani, the mayor of New York City, and, to a lesser extent, George W. Bush, did the same for the people of New York City and the nation. All of these leaders provided comfort and hope in a time of crisis.

Religions can do the same whether it is in a time of illness, death or daily life. A priest, rabbi, or imam praying with an ill person can bring comfort and be idealized for the solace brought. Devotees making pilgrimages often gain more inspiration or courage to practice their religion even in the face of opposition.

In Christianity, in particular Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity, there is the practice of praying through the intercession of the saints who give help in a time of special need. Prayers through the intercession of St. Jude, for example, are popular when the situation seems hopeless. Others might pray through the intercession St. Francis of Assisi for peace, or through St. Anthony of Padua to find a lost object. Many people of Mexican heritage pray through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe for favors. In the past, too, cities would pray through the intercession of a patron saint for protection from an enemy or a natural disaster. In Shi'ite Islam the example of Mohammed's grandsons, Hasan and Hussein, have inspired followers to acts of martyrdom for their religion.

In times of crisis and early in life, however, individuals tend to give people more credit than

they deserve—or to over-idealize them. Usually a “de-idealization” occurs gradually, unless there is a special scandal that deflates the idealization process in a traumatic way. One of the advantages of following a religious way of life, on the other hand, is that figures like Jesus, the Buddha, or Mohammed do not suffer from “de-idealization.” Their divine or special standing as founders of a religion give them an elevated status not accorded to others. Religion can therefore meet our need for idealization in a more stable, perduring way.

Even for “heroes” whose images are tarnished, the possibility of reconciliation and penance within Christianity can offer the prospect of healing and restoration for the failure to be as perfect as expected. Such reconciliation may re-establish some of the lost cluster of idealization.

#### SPARRING

If people’s need for idealization or heroes is met, they find that they have a need for sparring to test their strength, sense of purpose, or commitment to God, a person, or an ideal. Examples might be hearty debates over such issues as peace, social justice, health care, or immigration reform. This happens in childhood when a parent and child wrestle around on the floor or do “horseplay” together, allowing the child to test his or her developing strength against the big, strong parent without either being hurt or humiliated. Similarly it happens in political or religious debates where the developing mind of the young person is allowed a hearty and safe back-and-forth exchange with the parent whose values may differ. Through this testing, individuals can feel strong or affirm their sense of commitment. The famous story of Jacob wrestling with the angel in Genesis (32:25-33) or Jesus struggling to accept his death in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:35-46) would be religious examples of sparring. Practices of Christian asceticism, fasting during Ramadan for Muslims, or doing one of the various types of yoga in Hinduism are all ways in which religious believers can spar with the divine. In so doing, they can feel stronger and know better who they are and what their capabilities are.

Wrestling with angels, fasting, and performing other ascetical practices, however, are just a few of the ways in which religion helps us to meet our psychological needs. “Piggybacking” on Jesus or imitating him or the saints as heroes (idealization) are yet other ways that we meet such needs. Socializing or sharing with one’s religious

One of the advantages of following a religious way of life, on the other hand, is that figures like Jesus, the Buddha, or Mohammed do not suffer from “de-idealization.”

community helps us to meet our needs for twinship. Experiencing Jesus’ love and being a member of a religious community fulfill needs for mirroring and connection.

#### CONCLUSION

In summary, this article has illustrated that a life filled with faith and religious practice can meet the psychological needs described in the Psychological Nutrition Pyramid, and can strengthen and fortify the self. Such a life, with all the richness of experience it can provide in terms of belief systems, community involvement and affirmation of the individual, family and group, can be a great source of emotional security and cohesion, no matter what the formal religion or the more implicitly shared spirituality. But as with any system that fulfills human needs, there is also the inability of the same system to meet all of a person’s needs for belonging, mirroring, twinship, idealization, and sparring. This can lead to a traumatic disillusionment. Whenever we as human beings turn to others for any need, we expose our vulnerability. Correlatively, the same is true when we turn our lives, our souls, or our feelings over to whatever “God” we believe in. When we venture to expose our needs, sometimes we feel responded to and therefore secure, cohesive and satisfied. And sometimes we feel disappointed, a bit uncomfortable, even anxious. Or we may experience what some saints in Catholicism call a “dark night of the soul.”

It is only by having an unselfconscious confidence that our needs are human and normal and, specifically,



that *all* the needs of the Psychological Nutrition Pyramid can be met, allowing a personal sense of security and self-cohesion, that we can bounce back after disappointment. If there is disappointment at one location, for example, in one's faith or religion, turning for a while to other arenas for community belonging, mirroring, twinship, idealization, and, yes, even sparring, can serve to strengthen our basic selves so that we may be able and motivated to return to our churches and religion, and even to God again, for renewal and restoration. It is important to note, however, that not all needs of the pyramid can be fulfilled in one venue—at least not all at the same time. The ability to be strengthened in one place leads one to be able to make oneself stronger and more open to receive strength in another place. Faith and religion can play an integral role in the process of gaining human wholeness and well-being.

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# Wisdom and GRACE

Margaret Cessna, H.M.



It was a simple task. Quite ordinary, really, and she did it every day. What was out of the ordinary is that she did it at noon and not in the morning like the other women. They had judged her and shamed her and she avoided their company whenever possible. She went to the well to draw water. He was sitting there, in the center of town, resting. His apostles had gone to get provisions for the rest of their journey.

Imagine her surprise when Jesus asked her for a drink of water.

She questioned the propriety of the request: "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan. Why do you ask me for a favor?"

He explained to her that he was in need of this refreshing water for it was a hot day and he was very thirsty. He had no bucket to get his own. Jesus then told her that he was the source of everlasting water, everlasting life and that if she took what he offered, she would never be thirsty again.

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give will never be thirsty; no, the water I give shall become a fountain within, leaping up to provide eternal life," he said.

Mid-conversation, he told her to go get her husband.

"Don't have one," she said.

"Not now," he replied, "the man you are living with is not your husband. But you have had five husbands before him."

She gave him the water and was amazed at how much this man knew about her. So who was this woman? Was she the one who left husband one for husband two? Two for three? Three for four? Husband four for husband five? Is she the one who gave up on the institution of marriage and settled instead for an intimate roommate?

Or is she the woman who experienced a spark of wisdom from the gentle visitor and then ran to tell all of the townsfolk of this possible Messiah? Was she so transformed in that short moment with Jesus that the people who had shamed her believed her enough that they, too, ran to the town square to meet him? Her neighbors then knew from his own



words that this was someone who was exceptional. When they invited him to stay in their town, he did. For two days he spoke with them, taught them, captured their hearts. They came to believe that he was the Savior of the world for whom they had been waiting.

Who was she, really? And why do we not know her name? Is it because she was a Samaritan or, well, you know, a woman?

And who was this Jesus, this Son of God? Was he the same Jesus who was born in a stable, who got lost in the temple, who multiplied the loaves and fishes? Probably not. We are told that he grew in wisdom and grace.

Yes, he grew in wisdom and grace and so did this woman. Both cast aside ingrained and historical taboos. A Jewish male not only asked a Samaritan woman for aid. He asked a promiscuous woman at that! Unheard of. Samaritan townspeople asked Jesus to share his beliefs with them. Unheard of. Jesus actually accepting hospitality in Samaritan homes. Not something that was ever done. The inclusion of non-Jews as followers of Jesus. A new model. They all took risks and together embraced a broader vision of what it means to be people of God. His message was clear. And simple. Embrace one another in the spirit of God who loves us all. No matter what.

Goldie sang in *Fiddler on the Roof*, "I don't remember growing older."

Well, I don't either. Then one day I show up at a party and there are 60 candles on the cake. My cake. Time, perhaps, to try to put it all together.

In my twenties and thirties, I was on fire to change the world. I was into folk songs, new liturgy, and causes: nuclear power, Vietnam, the quest for peace. I was filled with fervor and drive. I marched all the marches, sang all the songs, carried all the banners and wore a POW bracelet.

By the time I got to my forties, I was settling instead for major changes in the United States and the inner city: racism, poverty, migrant workers, and still, Vietnam. Still marching, boycotting grapes and lettuce. Not singing as much but still carrying the banners.

By my fifties, I was ok with a neighborhood at a time, in the city that I call home. Teach the kids and they will change the city. Teach them well and they will change the world.

When I hit 60, I finally wised up. All I could change was myself. I realized that I would have to take a serious look at my own ingrained and historical taboos.

So which is the real me? As self changes, meanings change. Poverty, racism, homophobia, nationalism, war and violence still distress me but I have come to understand that I have the seeds of all of them in my own soul. I have also come to realize that the real me is me only as God sees me. I understand that I cannot look at people who suffer through their eyes but only through my own eyes. I don't know them. I cannot take what I think about them seriously. I can only take seriously what I think about myself. And hope to someday understand the me that God knows. And to understand better the God that only God knows.

It has been said that these are wisdom years, the last third of life. Time to look back. Time to think of all of the experiences and wonders in life and to have some small hope that a degree of wisdom will dawn. Time to craft new meanings and new understandings. Time now to model for those young ones who are on fire to change the earth and to bring peace and justice to a fractured planet. I know that there are some in their twenties, thirties, forties who have the energy to keep the evolution on track so that one day we can truly celebrate and embrace diversity. That today's hungry can one day feed themselves. That the next millennium will be an observance of many years of peace and abundance for all.

So bring on the next cake, and the one after that. Please, please, bring on the wisdom that is supposed to accompany each cake. Bring on a new kind of energy and a new kind of fire. Bring on a new kind of peace that can come only from new understandings. Bring on the same God. The God who is always with us. The God who models for us in an ever-new and evolving creation that peace and harmony are possible. Bring on renewed effort to be part of the building of the Kingdom.

So. As we sit in our own town squares, at our desk, on our front porch, in our kitchen, perhaps we, too, can continue to discover the water of everlasting life, find the same transforming grace as that woman at the well. And know that it can happen over and over and over again as we yearn to grow in wisdom and grace.



Sister Margaret Cessna, H.M., a sister of the Humility of Mary, is a writer from Cleveland, Ohio. This article is excerpted from her book *The Parrot Lady*, available from [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).



# The Art of Conversation

By Ted Fox



When mom told you to make eye contact during conversation, you may have been getting more than a lesson in good manners.

Kathleen Eberhard, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Notre Dame, is using eye-tracking technology to explore how we move our eyes to gauge if another person understands what we're saying. Her research is being driven by a theory of natural language use developed by Stanford University professor Herbert Clark.

"He argues that conversation is like any joint cooperative social activity," says Eberhard, who is assisted in her lab by graduate student Sarah Boyd and several undergraduates. Such activities are undertaken to reach a common goal, whether that be to dance a waltz or play catch. In the case of conversation, the goal would be the successful sharing of information, meaning speakers should check for listener feedback at various points in their telling of a story.

Eberhard's project to investigate this hypothesis is an innovative one.

"As far as I know," she says, "while there have been a number of previous studies that used videotapes in face-to-face conversations, none of them have used an eye-tracker, and so they don't get a precise measurement of exactly where the speaker is looking."



Each trial of the experiment requires two subjects. The first reads a seven-page Brothers Grimm folktale and, after taking a multiple choice quiz on it, puts on head gear that, thanks to a harmless infrared beam, will track his or her eye movements while telling the story to the other subject. A video camera is also focused on the speaker so that Eberhard can follow eye movements relative to his or her body language. The listener is asked to take the same quiz to ensure that he or she pays attention to the speaker.

Because the story is organized into very recognizable scenes and sub-scenes, Eberhard says one would expect the speaker to consider the information leading up to these "breaks" to be the most important ideas to convey.

"The question of interest is going to be: Given points where there are major breaks, are we seeing the speaker then look at the listener's face for evidence of feedback, and does the kind of feedback that the listener provides reflect (how crucial the detail is to) the story?"

Boyd has been going through the footage of the conversations, noting every listener reaction, from head nods to "m-hmms," and transcribing all of the dialogue between subjects. With such a thorough data set, Eberhard also wants to explore if there is any relation between where we look on a listener's face and the feedback we expect to receive, as well as if uttering an "uhh" or "umm" corresponds with a look away from the person to whom we are talking.

Eberhard and her team of students presented their preliminary findings at the Third International Workshop on Language Production at Northwestern University in August, 2006. Among other results, they found that speakers looked at their listeners' faces even more frequently than hypothesized—an average of once every three seconds—with approximately 81 percent of these looks occurring after they conveyed one of the story's basic points. An average of 73 percent of the listeners' acknowledgements of understanding occurred when speakers looked at their faces.

"These findings support the proposal that, in a narrative dialogue, a primary purpose of a speaker's look at the listener's face is to obtain evidence that the listener understands the meaning of the utterance," Eberhard says.

Once completed, she expects her team's research to have a number of practical uses, ranging from the development of therapies for patients with brain damage to technological applications. A better idea of how and when we expect someone to indicate they understand us would allow designers to get closer to creating computers that respond to dialogue more like humans.

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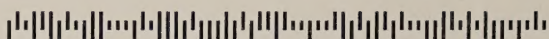
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